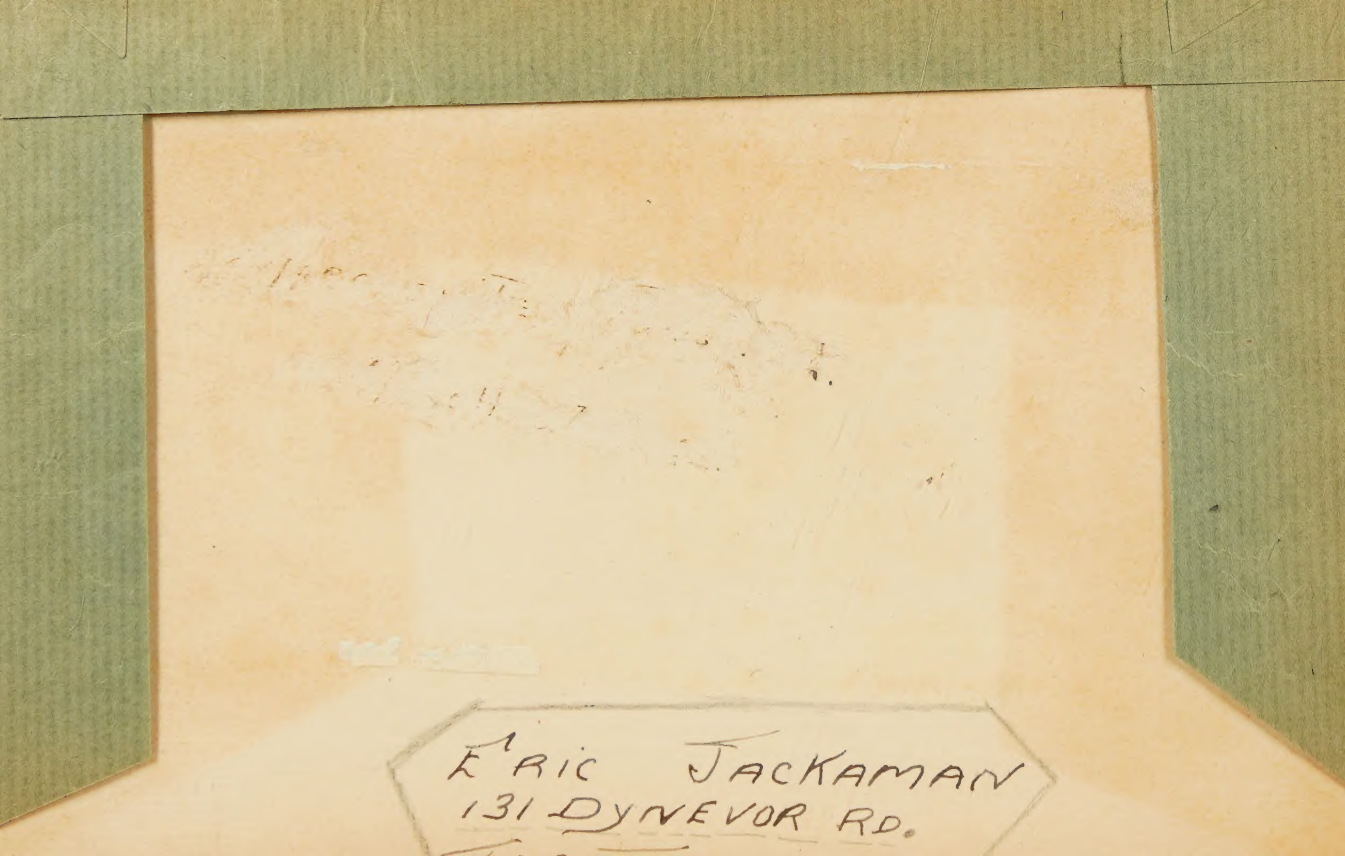
Maypoles
and
Morals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Maypoles and Morals

A NOVEL *By*

FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER

Author of

"Ladies in Hades"

MR. KUMMER'S new, vivid, and powerful novel of modern social life is a great many things — remarkable things — but it is above all else a very beautiful love story. In addition it is a book delightfully erudite, filled with shrewd philosophy, gay and sparkling humor, poetry and wit, and pictures in a new and altogether charming manner, the eternal conflict between MAN and—WOMEN.

MAYPOLES AND MORALS is an all informing novel of the love which expresses itself in passion and warmth — which binds men and women in locked embrace, and, alas, too often through ignorance of its meaning drives them asunder. Yet this love when deeply based both physically and spiritually, when properly and profoundly understood, may hold them together for a lifetime—one flesh and one spirit, linked by bonds of steel.

MAYPOLES AND MORALS combines the gayest of fantasy and wit with the deep red wine of passion — sparkling Chianti — the nectar of the gods.

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Maypoles and Morals

Eric Jackman

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By

FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER

Author of "Ladies in Hades"

Publishers

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Prelude

Prelude

AND so it came to pass that on a late afternoon in April Adonis was driving down to the gates of High Olympus. He whistled as he went, a ribald little tune, and laughed as he urged on his horses. Winters on Olympus were respectable but dull; the passage of the Vernal Equinox always filled him with the most delightfully pagan sensations. Springtime had come; he was eager to be about his earthly labors.

Venus, who was sitting on the steps of the temple admiring her beauty in a fish-shaped mirror, got up as she heard the sound of hoof-beats and leaned over the edge of the wall.

"Hoo-oo!" she cried, waving her mirror to attract attention. "This is *nice! Aren't you coming in?"*

Adonis pulled up his horses.

"Sorry, my dear," he replied rather impatiently, "but I'm frightfully rushed just now.

This is my day for leaving Olympus, you know." He glanced down the long, cypress-bordered road. "Tomorrow is the first of May."

Venus gave a not very polite sniff. The expression on her face betrayed annoyance.

"Oh, yes, so it is. Moving day, of course. How dreadfully conventional. I'm beginning to think, Adonis darling," she went on regarding him coldly, "that instead of looking on these yearly separations from me as a hardship, you actually seem to enjoy them! Anyone might suppose you were going on a vacation!"

"Nonsense!" Adonis perched himself sulkily on the edge of the chariot. "You know it's business. I can't help it, can I, if I'm the god of Fruitfulness? Sacred to the cause of Propagation? It was Jupiter's idea, not mine, that I should leave you for six months each year and go down to Earth to teach the people the ancient art of erecting Maypoles, and where to place them, and why. You've no idea how devoted they are to these pleasant and time-honored customs. They'd be lost without their spring festivals. Don't blame me *if I have to leave you.* I *didn't make the arrangements."*

"Just the same, I notice you take a great interest in them. You're positively silly about these ancient and worn-out myths."

"If you think I *am a worn-out myth you are very much mistaken."*

"Your statement is reassuring, Adonis darling, if not entirely convincing. Now if you will only come in—"

"You know I can't. I have my work to think of. I like it. I get a great deal of pleasure out of it."

"I'm sure you do."

"In fact, it affords me at times a peculiar satisfaction."

"My dear!" Venus raised her eyebrows. "But why peculiar? I hope none of these earthly ladies have been putting new ideas into your head."

"Certainly not!" Adonis said frowning. "I have remained true, if not to you, at least to your very conservative teachings. And besides, there aren't any new ideas on Earth—not any, that is, which would advance the cause I *labor in. Increase and multiply still remains the most important law of Nature."*

"And as a teacher of multiplication," Venus laughed, "I don't doubt you are very proud of your standing."

"I have *been complimented—"*

"I see. A huge success. Well, darling, nobody knows that any better than I do." She gave him a slantwise glance. "But what about me, left alone here for six months in the year, with nothing to do but twiddle my thumbs?"

"How about Vulcan?"

"My dear Adonis! He's so painfully—er—inadequate that he's amusing. Why not put off your trip for a few days? I know quite a bit about Spring Festivals myself." She began to descend the steps. Adonis glanced at her in alarm.

"My dear Venus," he said, picking up the reins, "I trust you are not contemplating any public demonstrations. Remember your age—"

"So!" Venus paused angrily, one foot on the sidewalk. "First you scorn me—then you insult me! I must say—"

"Don't be absurd. I haven't the least idea of insulting you, as you very well know. But you must admit that ever since that unfortunate affair between your son Cupid, and Psyche, you

have been a grandmother. Now on Earth I find any number of most attractive young females, willing, even anxious, to assist me in my work—" he whipped up his horses just in time to escape the mirror Venus hurled at him. "Goodbye, darling! See you as usual—in November!"

A moment later his chariot had disappeared over the crest of the hill, enveloped in a cloud of dust.

. . . . . .

All of which in the beginning may appear to have nothing to do with our story.

Book One

Seed Time

Chapter 1: Walpurgis Night

SYLVIA DUANE stood at one end of the long room, watching the kaleidoscopic swirl of dancers. They moved toward her to the music of the negro orchestra, in many brilliantly-colored waves, nymphs and bishops, matadors and geisha girls, gypsies, buccaneers and dryads, swaying, bobbing couples closely clutched in attitudes more primitive than classical. She was glad, now, that she had insisted upon costumes for her May Day Eve dance; her own rather frank inpersonation of Aphrodite had brought forth many startled congratulations.

She had been staring over the heads of the crowd for several moments, her thoughts pleasantly vague, when a figure standing in one of the open French windows at the end of the room attracted her attention. A tall figure agreeably young and good-looking, dressed in a short white tunic.

"Who is that young man over there, Harvey?" she asked, arousing her husband with an urgent but impolite elbow.

"Which young man?" Mr. Duane grumbled, adjusting his disarranged goatskin. He disliked costume dances. It was undignified, he thought, for a man of his years to appear in public dressed like a mountebank. Undignified and ridiculous. The particular character which he had elected to portray this evening bore out his assertions: as a satyr Mr. Duane left more than hoofs to the imagination.

"Over there by the window," Sylvia said, nodding. "The one who looks like a Greek god."

Mr. Duane peered between the weaving couples.

"And what does a Greek god look like?" he asked irritably, searching in vain for his glasses.

"The precise opposite of you, darling," Sylvia retorted with dangerous sweetness, turning to speak to a somewhat tipsy wood nymph who at that moment claimed her attention. When she again looked toward the window, the young man had disappeared.

"So you don't know who he was?" she said, staring at her husband with cool disfavor.

"I do not." Mr. Duane was still sulking. "I don't know a great many of the people you insisted on inviting here tonight."

"Awfully good-looking," Sylvia murmured. "It's strange, but I don't remember ever having seen him before."

"Why strange? The way these young people insist on crashing parties nowadays, it's a wise hostess who knows her own dancing partner." He glanced at his watch—unusual decoration for the wrist of a satyr. "Almost two o'clock. It's about time these people went home. Tomorrow is the first of May."

"It's already here, darling. Has been for two hours. And all it means to you, I suppose, is another round of golf."

"Well—I *did* promise Stapleton—"

"I knew it. You're—hopeless."

"And besides, I think the party is getting a trifle rough. Look at that couple out there on the stairs. Disgusting!"

"Hells bells, Harvey! Why didn't you come as a wet blanket? What if a few complexions *are*

messed up? And costumes. So long as no reputations are ruined why should *you* worry?"

"You never can tell what people will do, drinking this bootleg stuff."

"Really? I'm quite sure, my dear, that you are not speaking from experience. I have never felt the least uneasiness about *you*. And anyhow, I think its effects are largely mental. A rush of sex to the head, you might say. Still, I don't mind telling you that all the bedroom doors are locked."

"Good Lord, Sylvia—you don't mean it!"

"On the outside, darling. What a delightful imagination you have, at times. Too bad you so seldom go any further. I locked them myself. The effects of gin may be largely mental, but I still remember that spring is here. And to me it suggests more interesting pastimes than golf." With a high, bright laugh she flung a lace scarf about her shoulders and went across the room to the long window at which the young man had been standing.

A wide, flagstone-paved terrace faced her, beyond which lay a sunken garden, black and amber in the mellow light of a waning April moon.

Dark clumps of evergreens made fantastic, misshapen shadows upon the closely clipped young grass. There was a faint breeze, diffident and hesitating, the perfumed breath of spring. Subtle odors made up that intoxicating fragrance; narcissus and wood-violet, lily-of-the-valley and hyacinth, with strange undertones of rotting vegetation, the tang of moist, rank earth. She found the night air singularly refreshing after the stale atmosphere of the ballroom; her arms strained to embrace it. A night of mystery, of enchantment, with music in the moonlight and uncouth, smiling figurés peeping from behind every shadow. On such a night, strange things might happen, she thought, then laughed ironically at her imaginings. Life seemed made up of wishing that something *would* happen—something new and different. And always the curtain rose upon the same drab stage, set for the same banal little comedy of domestic existence.

Halfway down the garden, at one side of a small, paved circle, a blur of white disturbed the grotesque outlines of a box-tree. Sylvia smiled, a somewhat defiant smile, and went down the steps of the terrace.

Chapter 2: Harlequinade

SHACKLEFORD had been standing at the window for several minutes before he descended from the terrace to the garden. It was a very lovely garden, and would, he thought, be a pleasant and restful place in which to sit, on this mild spring evening; he saw some benches here and there among the shrubbery.

The party, to judge from the noises which came through the open window, was a lively one, but a brief inspection of the dancers had not encouraged him to go inside. There was one woman, a lovely, dark-haired creature dressed as Diana who had attracted his momentary attention, but she danced with indifference, her head among the stars, and apparently did not see him.

The night was unusually warm for May—too warm for dancing, he decided—and the room was unpleasantly crowded, and smelt of gin. He went

down the little flight of steps and seated himself on a bench near the center of the garden. His thoughts were on his work—the study he had been making of ancient pagan religions. It was like Collins to drag him to this house in which he knew no one and then leave him, to drive off with one of his numberless inamoratas.

Midway of the small paved space in which he sat, a statue faced him, the bronze figure of a faun, graceful and spirited, although its beauty was somewhat marred, he thought, by the presence of a large and clumsy figleaf. He got up and examined it, wondering that anyone sufficiently intelligent to have appreciated the statue in the first place, could have spoiled it by any such absurd addition. The figleaf, of bronze, lacked the delicate *patina* which lent such beauty to the rest of the figure; it had apparently been added later, and was securely rivetted on.

He had been in the garden but a few moments when a young woman emerged from one of the French windows and stood on the terrace above him. She was a small woman, agreeably slender, and dressed in the costume of some classical goddess. He watched her idly as she came down

the steps, wondering which particular divinity she was intended to be. For an instant he hoped for the dark Diana he had glimpsed in the ballroom, but as this woman came nearer he saw that she was blonde, with a piquant face, and a most gracious and pleasing figure. He was in very little doubt on this latter score, since her scanty fishnet draperies made no serious effort to hide it. Venus, he thought, and executed an admiring bow. Collins had pointed her out as Mrs. Duane.

Sylvia paused as she reached the edge of the stone-paved circle, and stood for a moment gazing at him, her expression half amused, half serious. In the faint moonlight she seemed almost nude, so completely had her costume become one with the shadows.

"Good evening," she said, smiling at him with her eyes. "It's nice, your being at my party, but —would you mind telling me who you are?"

Shackleford hesitated. He had been remiss, he knew, in not greeting his hostess immediately upon his arrival. A spirit of mischief rose in him, a fantastic and whimsical humor, inspired in part by his amused inspection of the statue—in part by the unusual nature of his surroundings.

"My dear lady," he said. "Since you are Venus, whom could I possibly be, but—Adonis?" He repeated his bow.

"But"—Sylvia stared at him for a moment, puzzled—"I'm not Venus at all. I'm Aphrodite."

Shackleford chuckled.

"The Greek form, you know, instead of the Latin," he murmured. "In either case I find yours equally—divine."

"That's charming of you," Sylvia smiled. "But you must have a name."

"Don't you like—Adonis?"

"I wasn't referring to your costume. Who are you really?"

Shackleford shrugged his shoulders. They were excellent shoulders, broad and smoothly muscular, as his closely-fitting tunic clearly revealed.

"Adonis—really," he laughed. "Why should that surprise you? Especially on Walpurgis Night."

"Walpurgis Night? I'm afraid I don't quite understand."

"May Day Eve, of course. A very celebrated festival, among us ancients. All the spirits and

demons and witches of the other world are supposed to be running around loose this evening. When I looked into your ballroom, heard your jazz band, smelt the gin, I realized at once that you were celebrating the occasion in the traditional manner."

"And just how do you make that out?" Sylvia asked, perching herself on one of the marble arms of the bench. This strange young man was proving rather interesting; she was intrigued by his whimsical smile.

"Why, the ancients, you know, always fumigated their houses with juniper berries, and made a frightful racket, to drive the evil spirits away."

"So that is why you disappeared so suddenly, is it?" Sylvia laughed.

"Not at all. I refuse to be classed as an evil spirit, in spite of the fact that Walpurgis Night *does* happen to be the occasion of my annual spring visitation. You'll find me listed as the god of fruitfulness and—other things, in all the best mythologies."

"And what are you doing in my garden?"

"For the past five minutes, dear lady, I have been admiring your very interesting statue."

"It *is* rather nice, isn't it?" Sylvia agreed. "We got it in Florence."

"Without, I trust, its highly indecorous costume." Adonis allowed his gaze to rest for a moment upon the grotesque and disfiguring fig-leaf. "I'm sure no self-respecting Italian would ever make the mistake of calling such brazen attention to the obvious."

Sylvia did not reply. The turn in the conversation had left her somewhat breathless.

"Of course it's no affair of mine," the young man went on, "but don't you think such devices rather ridiculous?"

"I admit," Sylvia stammered, "it *was* an afterthought."

"That is quite evident. But scarcely a happy one. It goes without saying that everyone knows what is behind the thing. Why not admit it? Why go to such puerile lengths to deny its existence?" His eyes sought hers, bright with merriment.

Sylvia attempted a hasty if somewhat lame defense.

"My husband thought, on account of the children"—she murmured.

"So you admit the children," Adonis laughed, "but deny their cause! How delightfully Anglo-Saxon! Well, I suppose one *can* always fall back on storks."

Sylvia smiled in spite of her embarrassment. If this astonishing young man was trying to shock her, she would show him that she, too, was not without sophistication.

"They are very young children," she said.

"But still, I trust, they have opened their eyes. Has it ever occurred to you, dear lady, that no matter how securely this figleaf may be rivetted on, it is always possible, by peeping in sidewise, to distinguish quite clearly the outrageous and damnable facts?"

"I'm sure I'd never think of peeping," Sylvia said.

"Naturally not. You are a married woman. And marriage, I assume, is a liberal education."

"At least an education," Sylvia amended, "although not always so liberal as one might think."

"I see." Adonis nodded with understanding. "I suppose it *has* its disappointments. But still, one is bound to obtain at least a glimpse of the

salient facts of life. Now with children it is different. Very young children, at any rate. It is natural for them to peep, particularly when you set up obstacles to arouse their curiosity. Have you ever thought, that it might be better for them to acquire their knowledge less obliquely? By the more honest and direct method of calling a spade a spade? A homely implement, I admit, but one not despised by the Master Agriculturist himself, in cultivating the garden of life."

"My dear Adonis," said Sylvia, somewhat confused, "your arguments overwhelm me. In spite of my husband's objections I shall have the thing removed at once."

"But discreetly, my dear Venus, and without ostentation, or some of your other statues may be upset. I see a charming wood-nymph over there who looks dreadfully bored. The unexpected shock might cause her to topple over backward, right into the middle of your fishpond. But forgive me. I really didn't intend to deliver a lecture on child education, although my suggestions are not without merit. You've no idea what an interesting task I have here on earth, spreading the

gospel of fruitfulness—teaching all the young and growing things how to sprout."

"I understand now," Sylvia laughed, "your interest in my statue."

"Exactly. You cannot alter the essential facts, no matter how tightly your hypocrisies are rivetted on. Truth crushed to earth, like the sap in spring, will always rise. It's one of Nature's laws. Spring festivals were designed to celebrate the fact. I need scarcely tell you that the Maypole is a very old and popular institution."

"It seems to me I *have* heard," said Sylvia, "that it goes back rather far."

"To Adam, my dear girl, in one form or another. As part of a very ancient and widespread religion." Adonis smiled and shrugged his pleasant shoulders. "Forgive me for being so tiresome. I'm always that way, after a winter on Olympus. Do you mind my telling you that I think your costume charming?"

"Oh, do you?" Sylvia fairly shimmered at him. "How nice! I hoped it would be a success."

"It is, my dear, I assure you. Quite perfect. There is nothing you could possibly add to it that would make it any more—provocative."

"I suppose you mean that as a compliment."

"Of course. You wanted it to be provocative, didn't you?"

"Perhaps. And the only person I have provoked so far is my husband. He said it was outrageous—that no married woman had the right to arouse the interest of other men in any such manner. There was no point to it, he said."

"No point, I grant you," Adonis observed reflectively, "that a husband could possibly admit. With women it is of course different. I gather from your remarks, my dear Venus, that you are not entirely happy in your domestic arrangements."

"I suppose," Sylvia murmured, "that I am just a normally dissatisfied wife."

"Unsatisfied is often the better word," Adonis suggested, "although in your case, of course, I speak without that intimate knowledge—"

"Do you like it, on Olympus?" Sylvia inquired hastily.

"It's not so bad, for six months in the year. The other six, I am happy to say, I spend on earth looking after the interests of my flock."

"Goats, I presume."

"Not entirely. The principles of multiplication are not quite so simple as all that, in spite of the claims of certain modern biologists. But to go back to your costume. You really do look a great deal like her."

"Like whom?" Sylvia asked, puzzled. She had been thinking of something else.

"Venus, of course."

"Anyone might suppose you were intimately acquainted with the lady."

"I am. Too well in fact. Our little affair has been a matter of public gossip on Olympus for ages." He put his hand about Sylvia's waist and lifted her gently from the arm of the bench. "You and I have a great deal in common, my dear. You really should not be so far away—Aphrodite."

"I think you had better confine yourself to the Latin form," Sylvia said, struggling to recover her equanimity. "And you still haven't told me who you are, or how you got here. I don't wish to seem impolite, but I'm sure you weren't invited."

"I wasn't," Adonis grinned. "Not formally, that is. But this is May Day Eve, my dear girl—I

happened to be passing your house—I saw that you were giving a party—my costume seemed not inappropriate, and so—I just dropped in. On Walpurgis Night further explanations would be superfluous. To you I shall always be just—Adonis. Is there anything else you would like to know?"

"You might," Sylvia suggested, "tell me more about your affair with Venus. It has been some years since I studied mythology, and I confess that my knowledge of your past is rather hazy."

Adonis began to laugh.

"Very well," he said. "Our famous romance is not without its humor. The lady, like yourself, is married—"

"Really?"

"Oh, yes. To Vulcan, you know. And I think she, too, finds her husband a trifle—inadequate."

"I haven't said—"

"You mustn't interrupt, or I can't go on with the story. So of course the lady, following a well-known Olympian custom, has had a great many love affairs. Her son, Cupid, was the result of one of them, although I think she succeeded in con-

vincing Vulcan that he was to blame. I suppose the idea flattered him."

"One day as I was passing her house I heard the most terrible screams. Thinking that something dreadful had happened, I opened the front gate and went in. I had only been on Olympus a few months, at that time, and did not know Venus very well, otherwise I never should have opened that gate."

"The moment I entered the house she ran up to me and put her arms about my neck."

" 'Help!—help!' she cried. 'That wretched boy of mine has just shot me with one of his arrows!' "

"I looked at her closely but discovered no sign of a wound."

" 'Let us hope,' I said, 'that your injuries will not prove to be serious.' "

"She gave me a queer, sidewise stare, her arms still clasped very tightly about my neck."

" 'It is always serious,' she whispered, 'to be wounded by one of Cupid's arrows. I must know the truth at once. Please make a complete examination.' "

"The situation," laughed Sylvia, "was not without its possibilities."

"My dear girl—they were endless. That was thousands of years ago, and the lady is pestering me yet!"

"How ungallant, to say so. But *do* go on."

"I made the examination. As complete a one as I could."

"And discovered no wound?"

"None whatever."

"Perhaps you did not look closely enough."

"That, my dear girl, is precisely what Venus said. In fact, she seemed very much annoyed."

" 'There it is, stupid,' she told me, taking off her famous golden girdle. 'Are you totally and completely blind?' "

"I looked again, and discovered the tiniest bit of a scratch. She had made it herself, I'm quite sure, with the buckle of her belt."

"Well?" Sylvia said.

"Well," laughed Adonis, "that is about all, except that she proceeded to tell me that when anyone was wounded by one of Cupid's arrows, they always fell desperately in love with the very

next person they met. And it slowly began to dawn upon me that I was that person.

" 'I really think I had better call a doctor,' I said, starting toward the door. But Venus was too quick for me."

" 'You are the only doctor in the world, Adonis darling,' she said, again throwing her arms about my neck, 'who could possibly cure me. I place myself entirely in your hands. And for fear that wretched boy of mine might come in here and cause more trouble, I am going to lock the door.' "

"Apparently, even on Olympus," Sylvia murmured, "the ladies do not scorn our modern methods."

"Not at all. Venus, for one, rather prides herself upon her versatility."

"And what about poor Vulcan?"

"My dear girl—you are married yourself—"

"I have a husband."

"Isn't it the same thing?"

"Always. And I had so hoped it might be—different."

Adonis swept her lightly into the crook of his arm.

"What would you do," he asked, "if I should kiss you?"

"How should I know?" Sylvia laughed. "I've never been kissed by a god."

"You will never be in a position," said Adonis quickly, "to make that statement again."

The kiss was an Olympian one and pleasantly long. At last Sylvia recovered her breath.

"Do you know," she whispered, "it's absolutely ridiculous, my being here, and—and talking like this—to a perfect stranger. And yet —I've adored it."

"Including the —kiss?"

"The kiss most of all."

"Then we are losing valuable time!" Adonis exclaimed, once more drawing her to him. As their lips met, a querulous voice came through the thin night air.

"My husband!" Sylvia gasped, tearing herself away.

Adonis looked up. A bald and not at all impressive satyr stood at the top of the terrace steps.

"Are you there, Sylvia?" he called, peering into the darkness.

"Yes, darling." She ran lightly up the flagstone walk.

"Everyone's leaving. What are you doing out here?"

"Looking for my Greek god, Harvey."

"Humph! I hope you found him—and sent him about his business."

"I think, my dear"—Sylvia laughed over her shoulder—"that he was going about it very nicely indeed, without any help from me."

Chapter 3: On Making a Polite Gesture

SHACKLEFORD was sitting at the desk in his agreeably bare small study, trying without much success to turn his thoughts to his writing.

The bright May sunshine laughed at him, the nodding lilac blooms beside his window reached in with dainty perfumed fingers to drag him from his work. A misshapen dogwood tree, in profile not unlike a signpost, waved a long, white arm in the direction of the main road, urging him on to spring adventure.

The events of the night before still clogged his memory—Collins, insistently carrying him off to Mrs. Duane's dance—the dark woman dressed as Diana whom he had seen there and not met, whose aloof but striking personality had made such a vivid impression upon him—his drolleries with Mrs. Duane.

He wondered about Mrs. Duane. Was she just a bright little parrakeet, for whom existence best expressed itself in a series of amusing infidelities? Or was she a woman of depth? He did not know, nor, he reflected, was there any good reason why he should care. She had assumed her part in their little comedy with both humor and a certain gay sophistication, but—the play was ended. He had his work to do—work which was in many ways the most important he had yet undertaken. It was one of his weaknesses, perhaps, to concern himself unduly with the motives and characters of the women he met—women whose frank adulation had many times in the past lured him from his tasks toward a goal which he had never found especially worth attaining.

He had come to Easthaven to write. His past winter had not been a particularly productive one. The cloud-crowned heights of Park Avenue with its classic temples and towers held many an insistent Venus eager to seduce him from his labors with tales of a neglectful Vulcan. He glanced at the notes which lay before him. The work upon which he was engaged involved much serious reading. The marked pages of an open

book, dealing with the Adonis myth, had supplied the inspiration for his harlequinade in Mrs. Duane's garden—the classically beautiful young god, brought to his death by the love of Venus, freed for six months from the netherworld to carry out on earth his fruitful labors. The age-old drama of the seasons—of the death of Nature during the black and barren winter—the rejuvenation of all things in the spring—the coming of seed time, the season of mating—oldest of all festivals, when mother Earth, quickened by the Sun, once more gave birth to Nature in green and verdant splendor—the worship of the divine miracle of reproduction in simple, well-understood forms—columns of white stone, garlanded with flowers, gaily-bedecked Maypoles, about which the youths and maidens exultantly danced—Easter eggs and mistletoe—sacred groves—moonlit nights beneath the rustling leaves of olive trees and myrtles—sweet mysterious love-rites—trembling kisses—

He put down his pipe. He had bidden farewell very definitely to Venus and all her insistent sisters. The affair of the night before had been merely an amusing interlude. He thrust its mem-

ories from him, wondering a little that the face of the dark woman dressed as Diana remained so persistently in his mind. He was done for the time being with all women; he must work. That, after all, was the real, the important thing in every man's life. Work—and achievement. The joy of it. Bigger than any woman—bigger than himself—

"Hoo-oo!" a voice sounded outside the window, impertinently gay and lilting.

"Hell!" Shackleford said, dropping his newly-sharpened pencil. It was not so easy, he reflected, to escape the wiles of Venus.

A blonde head, crowned by a small felt hat, appeared against the waving lilacs. He saw that it was Mrs. Duane, looking astonishingly youthful and luring in her tightly-fitted skirt of knitted jersey, her green wool sweater.

"Greetings, Adonis!" she said. "And how is his godship this fine morning?"

Shackleford rose and stood by the window. It was difficult, he found, not to smile.

"Very nicely, my dear Venus," he replied. "I am astonished to see you up and about so early."

"You shouldn't be. I've a lot to do. Today is the first of May."

"And therefore a holiday—at least for goddesses. And how, may I ask, did you discover my sylvan retreat?"

"It was quite easy. I merely asked McQueen, the Bartletts' gardener. Their place happens to be next to ours. And this house is on it. The Bartletts are in Europe as you know, but McQueen, who is not only an extremely canny person, but a friend of mine, tells me that they have rented the lodge to a writing gentleman from New York for the summer—a person named Shackleford, I understand. So you had better clear out at once."

"My dear lady," Shackleford laughed. "It is always a mistake to pay attention to the gossip of servants. That story is merely one of my little subterfuges. It would never do for me to admit that I am a god—in public, that is. With all the work I have to do, I'd be overrun—"

"If you mean the kind of work you were telling me about last night, I don't doubt it. And probably arrested, as well. McQueen is a good Irish

Catholic, who would have no traffic with any but respectable gods."

"I know. But I feel sure that you will keep my little secret. Our friend McQueen wouldn't know a god if he saw one. He believes my story implicitly. I told him I was writing a book."

"Your memoirs, perhaps?"

"Why—yes—I suppose you might put it that way."

"In a thousand and one volumes, no doubt."

"You flatter me. Whatever my successes as a god, as a writer I am not that prolific. One volume will suffice. Anything more would be mere repetition."

"Even repetition may have its advantages. Have you forgotten that you kissed me last night?"

Shackleford leaned quickly out of the window but Sylvia danced away.

"I have been doing my best to forget it, all morning," he grumbled.

"I don't think that is a very nice thing for any god to say. Especially a nature god. I might as well be playing golf with my husband."

"If it had not been such an interesting kiss,"

Shackleford smiled, "I could have forgotten it without half trying. Won't you come in?"

"I am afraid, with you, it might not be safe."

"Thanks for the compliment. The study door is open."

"And my fate, I presume"—Sylvia laughed up at him with her eyes—"is in the lap of the gods."

"Wouldn't you like that?"

"Possibly—if it ends there. But gods are extremely upsetting. I shouldn't care to lose my —equilibrium."

"Why should you?"

"Isn't it usually a preliminary step?"

"Perhaps. But one can always watch one's step. Forewarned is forearmed, you know."

"Really? I should think that even in the most unfavorable circumstances two would be quite enough." She laughed and went quickly around the corner of the house.

When she came into the study, Shackleford, who was filling his pipe, saw that she carried in her hand a small, leather-covered book.

"There is one thing, Adonis," she said, seating herself lightly upon the edge of the writing-table,

"that I really must ask you to explain. After you left me last night, I thought that, since I knew so little about you I had better look you up. And the only really interesting information I could find was in Mr. Shakespere's celebrated poem. Now, of course, it may be that the story as he tells it fails to do you justice, but it seems to me that, for a god, you emerged from that affair with very little credit—"

"It's a base slander," Shackleford laughed, trying to take the book from her.

"Just a moment." Sylvia deftly frustrated his efforts. "I think, before we go ahead, that I should refresh your memory slightly by reading you a few stanzas. Then, if you have anything to offer in your defense—"

"A damnable misstatement of facts, as I am amply prepared to prove."

"But you haven't heard my accusations, yet. Take these two lines, for instance:

" 'The warm effects which in him she finds missing
She seeks to kindle with continual kissing.'

I don't think, my dear Adonis, that *that* reflects any great credit upon you, especially after the

way you talked last night. Or this." Again she read:

" 'Sweet boy,' she says, 'this night I'll waste in sorrow.
Tell me, love's master, shall we meet tomorrow?'
He tells her, no; tomorrow he intends
To hunt the boar with certain of his friends.'

Now that, you must admit, was certainly a very unkind way in which to treat a lady. And this:

" 'Her pleading hath deserved a greater fee;
She's Love, she loves, and yet she is not loved.' "

Shackleford reached out and took the book from her. Turning the pages with fingers which were not altogether steady he glanced through the poem. Sylvia, to read the fine print over his shoulder was obliged to sit on the arm of his chair; it was instinct, perhaps, which caused him to circle her with one of his arms and thus support her. So they remained, silent, until he closed the book. But when he turned and attempted to kiss her she was off like a flash. He had supposed that she expected it, but to his surprise she darted across the room and began to

examine the contents of his desk. The closely interlined pages of manuscript seemed not to interest her; she snatched up a bit of carved jadeite, a small bronze elephant with ivory tusks, and as quickly put them down. Some notes on a scrap of paper attracted her brief attention but it seemed to Shackleford that she did not read them, and that the hand which held the paper was as unsteady as his own. All the while she kept up a flow of quick comment: "What is this book *The Golden Bough* about?—I've never heard of it. Are you superstitious about elephants? I know a man who has over a hundred. Do you write so many hours every day? I should think it would be dreadfully trying. Just where do you get your ideas?" If he had had any this morning, Shackleford thought, they had been thoroughly dissipated. She apparently did not expect answers to her questions, and he attempted none. Presently she took up a cigarette and sat on the edge of the desk, smoking. Her slender, well-formed legs in their shining stockings were as provocative as her white shoulders had been in the fishnet costume of the night be-

fore; the warm glow of flesh through the meshes of the silk was dangerously enticing.

Shackleford watched her with a certain not unpleasant annoyance. Just why had she come? he wondered. She was not a very young woman —not much under thirty, he thought, and yet the round curve of her knees, the smooth contours of the muscles beneath them, were baits which it was difficult to view, unmoved. Why did she dangle them before him? He could tell nothing of her thoughts from her face; the expression on it was a smiling mask which he found himself unable to penetrate. She puffed nervously at her cigarette for a few moments, then tossed it out of the window. She must be going. He was very busy, she knew. She had walked over to the lodge to get the morning air; it was scarcely a quarter of a mile through the woods. She had looked for arbutus, on the way, but found none. Perhaps it would be best for her to go at once, and leave him to his work. But still she made no attempt to do so.

Women were inexplicable, in certain moods, Shackleford thought. Shameless, even, in shaming men to their wishes. How often the response

was merely one of habit—an age-old desire to play the part of the pursuer, and not the result of any deeply-stirred emotion? Why had she read him that poem? Was it to shame him into kissing her? He knew that she expected it; knew that he inevitably *would* kiss her, after that other kiss in the garden. But that had been last night, with the mystery of darkness, of moonlight about them. Here, in the sunshine, with his work calling—

"I really must go," Sylvia said, sliding lightly from the desk. "I only came to pay my respects to a—god." She stood by the closed door, smiling. "And to say that, after looking you up, I think you have been very much overrated."

He had not meant to accept the challenge, but the ironical curve of her lips swept aside his resolutions. He drew her to him, felt the firm flesh of her body suddenly flow in his arms like wax, melted by an inner flame.

The reflections which had filled him, the annoyance which had prompted him to analyze her motives, vanished to some unimportant limbo. And yet, as he kissed her, her head bent against his arm, her lips lifted eagerly to his, he was still

aware of a curious detachment from the emotions of the moment. Impressions came to him, recorded themselves upon his active senses. The faint perfume of her hair—the chirping of a sparrow in the yard outside—the moated beam of sunlight which thrust itself across the room like a sword-blade. Her eyes, unlike his, were closed; she seemed satisfied to remain there passive in his arms, content with kisses. Women *were* inexplicable, he thought again; with men there was always the desire to go on,—to explore still further the swiftly-mounting roadway of the passions. He was no longer content to give, and receive, those urgent kisses. He wondered for a moment if she, with a woman's subtlety, understood that and was waiting for him to point their further way.

"Has that wretched boy wounded you with one of his arrows, dear Venus?" he asked softly.

She made no answer, but continued to press her lips against his. Her eyes opened; she seemed to be gazing at him through a haze of passion. Shackleford stood quite still, wondering if she remembered his absurd story of Venus the night before—if she realized the significance of his

question. He put out his arm, turned the key in the lock of the door to the garden. They were alone in the house; Mrs. Curlett, the housekeeper, had gone to the village to do her marketing. The look in Sylvia's eyes became a laughing fear.

"I must go," she murmured, without moving. Her cheek burned hot against his. Shackleford kissed her again.

" 'Wax-red lips,' " he quoted. " 'Sweet seals' " . . . She seemed very small and soft against his arm. Her hat had tumbled to the floor; over the rough tweed of his coat-sleeve her yellow hair rippled in a shining cascade. An amazing morning, he thought, staring guiltily at his desk. Less than an hour before he had said good-bye to all the sweet sisterhood of Venus. And now—

The sound of crunching gravel, of a knocker loudly beaten stirred him to quick action. Someone was at the front door. With a little gasp Sylvia slid from his arms, picked up her hat.

"Try another of my cigarettes," he said over his shoulder as he went from the study into the hall.

A ruddy man with bristling ruddy moustaches

stood upon the doorstep, touching his battered brown hat.

"I stopped by, sorr," he said, "to see if you do be wanting annything, and to bring you this." He placed a letter in Shackleford's hand. "Shall I fetch your mail, sorr, when I get that for the big house, or will you be asking for it at the post-office yourself?"

Shackleford considered. His study of Greek mythology had taught him that Mercury quite often arrived at the psychological moment, bearing important messages from Olympus.

"Bring it, McQueen," he said, "if it isn't any trouble."

"Not a bit, sorr. I do be getting it every morning, when I drive in to the store. 'Tis no trouble at all, sorr, to stop for a moment by the way." He took off his hat, wiped the moisture from its sweat-band with hairy fingers. "A fine day, but warm, sorr, for this time of year. The young plants will be needing more rain. Mrs. Curlett tells me you got your trunks all right, sorr. If you should be wanting annything else, just let me know. Good day, sorr." He crunched off down

the walk, his heavy heels scattering the gravel. Shackleford went back to the study.

To his astonishment, Sylvia was not there. The door to the garden stood open. He saw her running down the lilac-bordered path—her hat under her arm, her blonde head bobbing in the sunshine as though capped by a golden casque. Where the path curved into a stretch of woodland she paused and looking back waved him a light and careless hand.

Shackleford turned to his desk. A note lay on it, scrawled in pencil, upon a sheet of manuscript paper. He read it, smiling.

"Have decided to let my faun stay as he is. It is far too dangerous to allow *any* sort of nature god to go about at this time of year unprotected." The note was signed "Venus," and under the name, in crude outline, was the picture of a large and smiling fish.

Shackleford stared at the note for a moment, then dropped it into his wastebasket.

"Even a god," he said whimsically, "in order to maintain his reputation, is obliged at times to make a polite gesture."

Chapter 4: Dark Diana

SYLVIA DUANE was sitting under a striped umbrella on the terrace, drinking tea with her friend Ann Darrow.

The spring air was brilliantly clear, with the iridescent brilliance of prisms. Countless points of yellow sunshine danced in it, moving here and there like the flakes of gold in a glass of *eau de Dantzig*.

"He's perfectly adorable," Sylvia said. "I asked him over this afternoon because I wanted you to meet him."

Ann Darrow smiled very slightly, with her lips; her cool eyes remained unsmiling.

"He must have been the one I saw standing near the window, the night of your dance. A tall, well-built man in a short white tunic?"

"Of course! And inexcusably handsome. I told Harvey he looked like a Greek god. It made him furious."

"I thought," Ann said slowly, "that he looked like a man who has been very much spoiled by women."

"I suppose so. Men of his type usually are. He's a writer, from New York, the Bartletts' gardener tells me, and has taken their little gatekeeper's lodge for the summer. His name is Shackleford, McQueen says, and he's working on a book. Just why didn't he appeal to you darling? I thought him charming."

"I'm usually suspicious of men who look like Greek gods."

"Ha!" Sylvia's laughter sparkled. "That isn't the worst of it. Mr. Shackleford not only *looks* like a Greek god—he *is* one! He's Adonis! He told me so himself."

"His conceit in selecting that particular god convinces me that I shall detest him. Thanks for the tea. I really must be going."

"Nonsense, Ann. *Do* sit down. He didn't say he was Adonis to be conceited. As a matter of fact, I don't think he is—a bit. When he first met me, in the garden, and saw that I was dressed as Aphrodite—Venus, you know—and I asked him who he was, he said that since I was Venus

he would naturally have to be Adonis. I thought it rather clever of him, myself."

"When you asked him who he was? Didn't you know?"

"Not then. How could I? Bert Collins, who brought him, had dashed off as usual with some girl. So when I found him sitting alone in the garden—"

"You proceeded to make Harvey even more furious by staying out there for half an hour and flirting with him." Ann Darrow smiled again—a slowly kindling smile that transformed her apparent aloofness into a caress, singularly warm and inviting. "Poor Harvey. He fumed and sizzled about like a funny red firecracker, ready at any moment to explode."

"I wasn't flirting," Sylvia said primly. "I was learning about ancient religious and spring festivals. A very interesting subject, my dear."

"And one," Ann laughed, "that eminently respectable married ladies would do well to avoid, except in the privacy of the home circle."

"But suppose there aren't any, in the home circle? At least not any to speak of—"

"Then I am afraid that like a great many

other eminently respectable married ladies, you will have to make the best of it."

Sylvia sat with her chin cupped in her hand, staring at two sparrows who were making their arrangements for spring housekeeping quite openly on one of the bronze shoulders of the faun.

"That's easy to say. Perhaps we can't all be as emotionally cool and collected as you are, Ann darling—apart from such earthly things. I'm more human. I want to be—loved."

"What woman doesn't?"

"Then you *do* feel that way, too? Especially when spring comes? As though you were waiting for something to happen? Hoping it will. Desperately!"

"Perhaps. But I'd rather not discuss my feelings on that particular subject, if you don't mind. Not even with you."

"H-m. No reason for you to be so superior about it, is there? Why shouldn't people discuss such subjects? Take my own case, for instance. Harvey's a good husband. Better, no doubt, than the average. But when it comes to love-making, he's about as amorous as a middle-aged snail.

Business is not only business, with him—it's a sort of religion. That and golf. I scarcely ever see him any more, except at mealtimes. Business —and twin beds! What a delirious combination!"

"I thought the twin beds idea was yours?"

"It was—at first. After Bobbie was born, you know. A mistake, my dear. Even twin beds may become symbolic. I almost got rheumatism last winter, with no one to keep me warm." She broke into her high, strained laugh. "Harvey's lost interest. I've thought of giving him Tristram Shandy to read. You remember the old gentleman's charming habit of winding up the hall clock, among other things, every Saturday night. But what's the use? Harvey would probably have suggested that I wind it myself."

"You're just in love with love, Sylvia," Ann said.

"Whatever it is, it's something I want. Harvey's ideas of love-making, my dear, are so casual —and brief—that they're—amusing. Well—brevity *may* be the soul of wit, but I rather think that most wives expect more from their husbands

than a hearty laugh!" She lit another of her endless chain of cigarettes.

Ann Darrow was sipping her tea, a curiously tense expression upon her mobile face.

"I don't like to see you so dissatisfied, Sylvia," she said.

" 'Unsatisfied' was the word Mr. Shackleford suggested."

"You two must have had a very frank conversation."

"We did. You'd be surprised. About fauns, and Maypoles, and spring festivals, and startled young wood-nymphs. I was so startled myself—then and later, that I almost fell over backward into the fishpond."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Symbols, darling. Merely symbols. Of an ancient and still very popular religion. Tell me something, Ann. If you were—dissatisfied, with your husband—not dissatisfied with him as the family head and provider, you understand, but because of certain deficiencies in other and perhaps equally important respects, would you, if you happened to meet someone you liked very much, and it meant no real harm to anybody,

forget the conventions, if you know what I mean, and—"

"Jump over the traces?" Ann Darrow's grey eyes, very warm and glowing at times, met Sylvia's now in a cold and level stare. "Of course not! I'm no professional moralist, Heaven knows! If I met a man, and loved him, I'd give him everything I had—but I'd leave my husband to do it. No great credit to me, I suppose. I just don't happen to care for half-loaves. Or—fishes. I'm afraid this Greek god of yours has been putting ideas into your head."

Sylvia tossed away her cigarette.

"Don't be absurd, Ann," she said. "You know as well as I do that no man ever has to put ideas of that sort in *any* woman's head. They are there already. A gift from God, I suppose. Well—I see no reason to be ashamed of them."

"Neither do I! No woman could understand what you feel any better than *I* do! After four years—" she paused, and the curious shadows which for the moment had lifted from her face again masked it—"you're just an elegant adventuress, my dear, adventuring in the game of spring love. Well, it isn't worth the candle. I

know." She drained her cup. "I'm not going to wait for this man, Sylvia. I'm sure he'll only bore me." She shook her small, proud head.

"Here he is now." Sylvia nodded over her shoulder. Shackleford was coming through the garden, carrying a small, paper-wrapped parcel in his hand. Sylvia thought him extremely handsome, in his shaggy brown golf suit. She liked tall men, with wavy hair, and laughing, whimsical eyes. Ann Darrow did not turn her head.

"Why—good afternoon, Adonis!" Sylvia called to him, as he mounted the terrace steps. "I'd about given you up. I want you to meet Mrs. Darrow."

Shackleford bent over Ann's hand. It was a small but very strong and capable hand, he realized, although it rested in his own but briefly. He knew that Mrs. Darrow was not glad to see him; the knowledge filled him with disappointment.

"I saw you here, the night of the dance, I think," he ventured. "Dressed as Diana. I thought your costume extremely effective."

Ann Darrow gave an indifferent shrug.

"Did you?" she said, and lit a cigarette.

"It was good of you to remember the book," Sylvia laughed, "I shall read it with especial interest, after all you have told me." Her eyes sparkled with mischief. The book, wrapped in brown paper, was the volume of Shakespere she had left at the lodge the day before.

Shackleford regarded the two women intently. They presented a singular contrast. Sylvia made him think of champagne, all gay froth and humor. Mrs. Darrow was like rich and heady Burgundy—the deep red wine of passion, he thought, keenly aware of her presence. It was impossible to escape this impression of intense physical vitality, although he knew that it was made without intention on her part, perhaps even without knowledge. She was too indifferent, he saw at once, to concern herself greatly with the impressions she made on others. Perhaps in that very indifference lay much of her charm. "Mrs. Darrow," Sylvia had said; it shocked him, momentarily, to learn that she was married. Somehow he had not expected it. She was a woman, he decided, who spent much of her time in the open; the warm amber *patina* of her skin told him that. He thought her very beautiful; he liked her

vivid dark hair, alive, and mercifully unbobbed, but her eyes baffled him. He was not sure whether they were grey, or green; she veiled them, as she veiled her thoughts, beneath a hard mask. Once or twice, when he felt she was looking at him, he attempted to surprise her, to catch her off guard, but met only a cool, appraising stare. He had supposed, the night of the dance, that she was a small woman—her Diana costume had somehow made him think that—but while her wrists, her ankles were gracefully slender, her very lovely body was modelled more on the lines of a young Venus of Melos, than of the half-starved mannikins one usually met. He was wondering if she might not be at times a trifle stern, when some remark of Sylvia's caused her to laugh so lightly, yet with such rich gaiety, that it startled him, and he began to arrange his impressions of her anew.

Sylvia was rattling on about her love affairs, apparently wishing to impress him with her popularity. Harvey had accused her, she said, of flirting with five different men on the night of the dance. And had failed to mention the only one she really *did* flirt with. She gave Shackle-

ford a brilliant smile. He saw at once that she meant to claim him, quite openly, as a conquest, to bind him to her fragile chariot wheel. He wondered if Mr. Duane's omission of himself as having been among those with whom she had flirted, held any significance.

"You look awfully well this morning," she laughed, "for such an ancient divinity. How do you manage to keep yourself so young? After so many thousands of years one might think"—the sparkle in her eyes showed that she was still bent on teasing him.

"I find the wine of adventure rather stimulating," he smiled. "Don't you?"

"I might—if I were a man. A god, rather, going about winning the love of every woman I met."

"It isn't winning their love, but losing it," Shackleford said rather grimly, "that presents the chief difficulty."

"I've never heard such a conceited remark in my life," Sylvia declared. Ann Darrow seemed bored.

"I made it advisedly," Shackleford went on. "Women are so much more generous, in giving

things, than they are in taking them away. Freedom itself is sometimes a very welcome gift." He smiled pleasantly.

"You seem to bear up very well, under your burdens," Sylvia laughed, although he saw that she was annoyed.

"I try to remember my happy hours, and forget my disappointing ones."

"Your—failures, perhaps," Sylvia suggested spitefully.

"I'm sure," Ann Darrow remarked with cool contempt, "that your Mr. Adonis would never admit a failure."

Shackleford caught her mocking glance.

"When there *is* one," he replied, "the fault is invariably my own."

"Why not blame it on the gardener?" Sylvia said, darting a quick look at him; she was thinking of their experience at the lodge. "It would be so much more complimentary to all concerned."

"Would it?" He gave her a level smile. "I thought the fault, if any, lay rather in leaving the key in the door. But the oversight was intentional. Love should never be constrained. When

it is, it usually flies out of the window. Could I have paid you a more subtle compliment?"

Mrs. Darrow had not been listening to their murmured conversation. She seemed engaged with her thoughts.

"Is this your first summer at Easthaven?" she asked suddenly.

"My first. Although I know a great many people who come here."

"I should think," Sylvia said, still in her spiteful humor, "that you would confine your earthly visitations to Greece. I'm sure that ancient ruins and chilly marble statues would appeal to your nature much more strongly."

"On the contrary I find myself peculiarly at home in America. Among the younger generation. Their modern ideas agree very closely with my own. In fact, I shouldn't be at all surprised to find that they could teach *me* something."

"Just what *are* your ideas?" Mrs. Darrow asked.

"Well, for one, I think that love is merely the expression of a perfectly normal and very beautiful physical function, which the teachings of religion have somehow twisted into a sin."

"A pagan, I suppose."

"Perhaps—if by that you mean a willingness to deal with such questions at least as honestly and intelligently as they were dealt with by the ancient Greeks. Paganism has its faults, but it pictured the netherwold as merely a place of darkness. It took the theologians of a later and less kindly age to invent Hell and its tortures. At least the pagan gods were gentlemen."

Sylvia covered her small, shell-like ears.

"I'm a good churchwoman," she announced, "and I refuse to listen to such blasphemies. They're most—upsetting." But her eyes continued to smile.

Shackleford laughed.

"I haven't the least desire to convert you to my outrageous ideas," he said. "And I realize that a sudden glimpse of the truth *is* apt to upset one, at times. But surely, if the way of retreat is left open—"

"You're impossible!" Sylvia shook her gay and shapely head. "How are you getting along with your labors?"

"Literary?"

"Of course. What else?" She pretended a vast surprise.

"It isn't easy to write—in May. Especially the sort of thing I am doing now. So many problems arise—"

"I wish I might help you solve them."

"I wonder. The problems I had in mind were entirely mental."

"Then you don't think women have minds?"

"They must have, since they are always trying to make them up."

"Now that, I feel, is a dig. I don't believe you've made up your own."

Shackleford glanced covertly at Ann Darrow, who was smiling at some small boys on bicycles in the road.

"I haven't," he said. "Yet."

Sylvia followed his gaze.

"Yes—that's a problem, too. A difficult one, even for a man of your accomplishments—and brains."

"You think I have some, then? Brains?"

"I give you the benefit of the doubt."

"Then there was—doubt?"

"Decidedly. And still is. Men never know what they want."

"Do women?"

"Always. But they don't always get it."

"Perhaps they don't want it enough—and run away."

"It's—safer, don't you think?"

"Then why play with fire?"

"It's so pleasant. And warming. You don't need to be burned, if you don't want to be."

"Your philosophy, then, is to both eat your cake and have it."

Sylvia turned to Ann Darrow with an amused laugh.

"Our friend Adonis," she said, "is trying to solve a problem."

"Really?" Mrs. Darrow allowed her attention to come slowly back to her companions at the table. "What is it?"

"I have been wondering." Shackleford said, "whether there really is any such thing as love?"

"Before you can answer *that* question," Mrs. Darrow laughed, "you have first got to define what you mean by love. Almost everyone has a different idea about it, I think. From a biolog-

ical urge to a contract made in Heaven. What is your definition?" Her eyes met Shackleford's squarely.

"Wasn't the biological urge also made in Heaven?" he asked.

For the first time, Ann Darrow seemed keenly interested.

"So many men forget it," she said. "Perhaps love may consist in remembering that fact." She glanced at her watch. "I must go, dear."

"*Do* have another cup of tea." Sylvia raised the teapot invitingly.

"Sorry, but I can't." She rose.

"I could have Martin drive you over—"

"Oh, no. I like the exercise."

Shackleford put down his cup, willfully ignoring the protest in Sylvia's eyes.

"I need some exercise myself," he said. "If you don't mind, Mrs. Darrow, I'll walk along with you."

"Very well." She nodded indifferently. "Goodbye, Sylvia. See you soon."

"I could give you some very nice Scotch," Sylvia murmured, regarding Shackleford narrowly.

"Thanks." He put out his hand. "I'd better stick to ambrosia. Hope you like the book. Good afternoon." He left the table rather abruptly.

Mrs. Darrow had walked off without looking back to see whether or not he was following. She moved with smooth, lithe strides that seemed to bring into play all the muscles of her exquisite body. Until they reached the main road she did not speak.

"It was absurd for you to leave so suddenly," she said. "Sylvia wanted you to stay."

"Does Sylvia always get what she wants?" Shackleford asked, smiling.

"Do you?" Mrs. Darrow's keen glance crossed his like a sword.

"I'm afraid I haven't wanted anything quite enough, yet, to find out. Except perhaps, success in my work."

"You're writing a book, I understand."

"Yes. I usually am."

"Tell me about it."

"Some time."

"Are you afraid I might not understand it?"

"The subject *is* rather intricate. But interesting."

"To unsatisfied wives, do you mean?"

Shackleford reddened, wondering why this woman seemed to dislike him. It was a new experience. Sylvia, he supposed, had been talking.

"Perhaps," he said. "*You* wouldn't be interested, I'm sure."

"Why not?"

The question staggered him, for a moment. Did she mean to challenge his suggestion that she was not an unsatisfied wife? Or to imply that she was? He avoided the issue as skillfully as he could.

"Because the subject is a scientific one, and most women don't care for science."

To his surprise Mrs. Darrow laughed—a quick warm laugh that made his blood tingle. Her face, so grave a moment before, was almost impish in its humor.

"What have I done?" she asked, "to be classed with 'most women?' "

"I take it back, with the humblest apologies," Shackleford said quickly. "In fact, I have rarely seen a woman who was less like most women. Of course I'll tell you about my book, if you like.

But not now. I'm much too interested in you, as a human being, to talk about books."

"You make a study of human beings, I suppose. Especially women. And are very successful with them?"

"Why do you think that?"

"An impression. Perhaps I make a study of men."

"With even greater success, I am sure."

"I assume that was meant as a compliment I detest them. I'm not looking for success with men—the way you mean—"

"Nor I with women, the way you mean."

"I wonder." Again her glance crossed his like a blade. What brave, courageous eyes, he thought. Veiled eyes, like windows with their panes frosted. Whatever fires might leap behind were not for him to see—or for the world.

"If I might come and talk to you, some time," he ventured.

She shook her head.

"It wouldn't be worth your while," she said. "The next turn to the left will take you to the lodge. Good-bye." Before he quite realized it she had left him, swinging across the road with long

swift steps. He watched her pass between the stone posts of an imposing gateway.

"Diana, the chaste moon-goddess," he whispered. "Besought in vain by all the Olympian gods. She dislikes me. I wonder why."

Chapter 5: Amusing Diversions of a Young Man of Fashion

SHACKLEFORD decided that instead of working on so fine a morning he would go for a walk in the sun. In addition, he wished to ask some questions of a friend.

Late reading the night before had brought him to dawn with a headache; he had been burning the candle at both ends for the past five days. Mr. McQueen's prayers for rain had been answered, with much benefit, Shackleford noticed, to all the young and growing things, even though the steady downpour *had* kept him close to his desk. He abandoned his study the more cheerfully, since Mrs. Curlett, the caretaker, was indulging in one of her weekly orgies of housecleaning.

She came to him in the hallway, a prim and disapproving figure, suggesting in her rugged outlines an early Gothic structure.

"I thought I had best give you this, sir," she said, extending a bony hand.

Shackleford, glancing down, saw within it a bit of crumpled lace.

"What is it?" he asked, puzzled.

"A lady's handkerchief, sir, that I found in your study."

"Thank you, Mrs. Curlett. Please see that you never find another."

"I thought you might want it, sir."

He put the handkerchief into his pocket.

"It is a very bad habit, Mrs. Curlett," he smiled, "to find anything belonging to a lady where it should not be. Or to a gentleman either, for that matter. Particularly to a gentleman, I may say. It's apt to create misunderstandings. You can't tell *what* sort of trouble you might get us into."

Mrs. Curlett sniffed.

"I don't know what you mean, sir," she observed acidly, "by saying 'us'. I'm an honest woman."

"I am sure of it, Mrs. Curlett. I am prepared to stake my reputation upon it. Even my reputation as a god. In fact, Mrs. Curlett, I have rarely

seen a woman more richly endowed by nature with those particular qualities which go to make —and keep, one an honest woman."

Mrs. Curlett's thin lips became even thinner.

"I'm sure, sir," she snapped, "I haven't the least idea what you are talking about."

"I'm sure you haven't, Mrs. Curlett." He opened the door. "It is but further proof that your honesty is as unassailable as I feel certain it will always be—unassailed." He went out, smiling. The sunshine was very gay upon the young spring foliage: the trees sparkled with trembling clusters of rain-drops.

Shackleford found George Avery, the friend he had come to question, sitting in a wicker chair beneath a pergola at the rear of his handsome house.

"Good morning, Bacchus," he said. "A fine morning, and one that does us both credit." He gazed amusedly at the sprawling figure in the chair—a young man, agreeably dressed in a suit of grey flannel—an attractive young man, in spite of a certain pink puffiness about the eyes. In one hand he held a small object made of silk. "And what, my dear George," Shackleford went

on, "is engaging your attention so closely this fine morning?"

The flanneled young man waved his hand in languid greeting.

"These moderns, I believe, call them shorts."

Looking more closely Shackleford perceived that the object in question was a rather abbreviated bit of silk *lingerie*.

"The ancients," he laughed, "made them of steel."

"Steel? Oh, yes. When knights were bold and all that. The kind you padlocked on."

"Precisely. To insure chastity, if not virtue, while the good Sir Giles was away at Jerusalem slaying Saracens for the greater glory of God. A most selfish arrangement, I must say. Modern women are more free and untrammelled."

"With all the privileges of men, I suppose. At least they assume that position."

"Thus laying themselves open to the argument that there was more virtue in the double standard."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow. Women don't argue about such matters any longer. Or if they do, the argument is apt to be the other way

about. They imagine themselves not only man's equal, but his superior."

"You're getting to be a dreadful cynic, George." Shackleford sat down on one of the pergola benches. "But to return to the good Sir Giles. What a frightful row there must have been if the doughty hero, returning home some cold winter's night after a year's sojourn in the Holy Land, suddenly discovered that he had lost his key!"

"Eh—what?" George began to laugh immoderately. "Now that *is* an idea."

"Could the most skillful dramatist possibly devise a more distressing situation? What to do?"

"Frantic calls, I suppose, for the nearest locksmith."

"You are a man of resource, my dear George. Of brains. The thought does you credit? I have often noticed the chivalrous way in which you rush to the succor of ladies in distress. But I wonder it did not occur to the good Sir Giles, as he strode impatiently up and down his castle hall, that locks which could be picked in November might just as readily be picked in May."

"I fancy," George laughed, "that in ancient times the village locksmith was a very popular institution."

"I am certain of it, my dear fellow. As Mr. Shakespere so ably puts it, 'Were beauty under twenty locks kept fast, yet love breaks through and picks them all at last.' Which brings me to the not inapt conclusion that the man who seeks to guard his treasure with locks is a fool, and that he would be far wiser to cherish the object of his affections by the use of a more obvious and effective device, and one which, by the grace of God, was fashioned to that end long before such things as locks were invented."

"I take it," said George, "that your rather florid remarks, if set down in plain and every-day English, mean simply that the way to hold a woman is not to neglect her."

"Such was indeed my meaning, dear George. At times your penetration almost overwhelms me. And how, may I ask"—he indicated the bit of *lingerie*—"did you come by this very interesting exhibit?"

"I found it on the lawn this morning."

"Indeed! And who is its fair owner? I trust that she is fair."

"Fair or dark, I'm sure I don't know. It's one of the peculiarities of the liquor we drink nowadays. I gave a small party last night. There were two ladies in particular who allowed me to kiss them, at odd moments, in the pergola. But whom these things belong to, and why they should be here in my garden, I'm damned if I can remember."

"It is unquestionably the hall-mark of the gentleman," Shackleford said, smiling. "Such intimate belongings really should be monogrammed, to avoid confusion. Now you will have to ask both ladies—"

"I doubt if either of them would recognize me. It was dark—"

"Isn't a kiss in a pergola considered a proper introduction nowadays? How delightfully formal these young people are getting to be. My dear George, you have shocked me. What would your wife say to such Bacchanalian revels?"

"Edith! Didn't you know? She's gone to Paris to get a divorce."

"Sorry. But I haven't seen you for a month,

you remember. I'm amazed. Really. So your sins have found you out. And how, may I ask, did such a deplorable situation arise?"

"Sam Hunter's fault—the idiot! And his wife's. She's one of Edith's best friends, you know. Mrs. Hunter was having Sam followed, to get evidence for a divorce. She asked Edith to go with her, when the trap was sprung, as the necessary witness. Edith went, of course—glad to oblige a friend. When they broke in, they found Sam with two girls—and another man. Shocking—oh, quite. Particularly to Edith."

"I don't see why."

"Unfortunately, I happened to be the other man."

Shackleford lit a cigarette.

"George," he said. "I am afraid you have behaved very badly. You are not, I fear, a good actor. And husbands should always be good actors, you know, if they expect to remain—husbands. A man of your age—by the way, just how old are you?"

"A perfect thirty-six—at least until next August."

"Don't you ever get tired of pursuing these silly and not very elusive wood-nymphs?"

George Avery laughed.

"I'm trying to solve," he said, "a psychological problem. Why is it that so many women will spend hours telling you how virtuous they are, and then suddenly throw themselves into your arms with all the abandon of a lady of the pavements?"

"The answer is quite simple. The Spanish have a proverb which says that the eye of the owner fatteneth his horse. The lady merely wishes to impress upon you the value of her gift. A subtle tribute, in fact, which should always be properly, and thoroughly, appreciated. Now that your problem is solved, I am ready to hear that you have given up drinking and are prepared to lead a sober and industrious life."

"Why should I?"

"You owe it to your health, my dear fellow. You'll probably live longer?"

"My health is quite as good as yours. As for living longer, it seems rather pointless, unless you get more out of life than most people do. What is health for, if not to spend? Or money

either. Nobody wants to keep them like family heirlooms—locked up in a box."

"I'm afraid, George, that you inherited entirely too much of both—for your own good. All you seem to get out of life is a pain in the head."

"At least I can afford to sleep it off, mornings, instead of being obliged to get up and go to work—"

"Work is a joy, my dear fellow. At least mine is."

"I suppose it *is* different, with an author. What are you writing now?"

"A book on primitive religions. Dealing with the wide-spread significance of so many of man's early customs and beliefs. The symbolism of the serpent, for instance—the antiquity of the cross-form—the worship of certain trees—the sacred oak—"

"Really?" George gave a saturnine laugh. "Rather a ponderous subject, I should say. I hope you are presenting it in such a way as to be within the average reader's grasp. Especially the average feminine reader's grasp. It's women, isn't it, that you writers have to cater to? I hope the

dear ladies will be able to take your symbolism in."

"Still the cynic, I see. My dear George, you're hopeless. But I did not come here to talk about my book, although I could tell you a great many interesting things, from the proper placing of weathercocks to the peculiar sacredness of the goat. Such matters are important only as parts of a larger philosophy, which I feel sure you are entirely too light-minded to understand. To tell you the truth, I came to ask you a question."

"This looks serious. I trust you have not been carrying your delightful investigations too far. As a lawyer, I always advise—"

"Don't be ridiculous. This isn't a legal question. If it were I'd go to somebody who needs the money. What I want to ask you is this—do you happen to know a family here in Easthaven by the name of Darrow?"

"Is it the family you are interested in, my dear boy, or just—Mrs. Darrow?"

"I'm not interested in either, in the way you apparently mean. It happens that I met Mrs. Darrow one day last week, at the Duanes'. You know Mrs. Duane, of course."

"I do. Slightly. A charming and delightful woman, with more than the usual share of woman's wit."

"Yes. I like her. Very much. But, in a way, she does not seem to me as interesting a woman as Mrs. Darrow. I'm not asking from mere curiosity, George. I thought her a most unusual and striking type. And it occurred to me that you might be able to tell me something about her—something more than she seemed willing to tell me herself."

George Avery watched the smoke from his cigarette rise in a delicate cobweb tube.

"You are not the first man, I imagine," he said presently, "who has found Mrs. Darrow interesting. I don't suppose you will be the last. Every unattached male in Easthaven—and a number not quite so unattached—has tried to solve that enigma—and failed. She's from up north somewhere. Canada, I believe. Her name was Latane before her marriage, which suggests French ancestry. Naturally you know that she is beautiful. Any fool can see that. And intelligent. She gives one the impression, at least,

whether or not she actually is. Her husband inherited his money, and is quite rich. A son of Blanchard Darrow, who made a large fortune in copper mines out west. Nevada, I think. He's a big game hunter, an explorer of sorts, who hates society and likes to drink. Whether he loves his wife or not I can't say. Or whether she loves him. Most women talk about their intimate personal affairs to other women—broadcast their troubles, if they have any, to the world. If they haven't any, they usually invent some, in order to appear more interesting. Mrs. Darrow doesn't talk. Doesn't give a tinker's dam about the world. Otherwise, she's a splendid horsewoman, a superb swimmer, and the sort of person I'd like to have at my back if I were making a desperate last stand. You know what I mean. The sort you could absolutely count upon to do her share. Fearless. Game. Now that I've told you all there is to tell, from the standpoint of gossip, take my advice and forget her. I know you are more or less interested in unusual women, and probably derive a vicarious satisfaction from crossing swords with them, but Mrs. Darrow is not the

sort of woman who will flirt. If you do any fencing with her, it will be with bare points. So, as a friend, I advise you to steer clear of the lady, unless you are anxious to be hurt. Look here" —he placed his hand upon Shackleford's knee —"you've been working too hard. I can see it in your eyes. You need relaxation, not mental excitement. Play. Now I have two very charming young ladies coming to dine with me on Saturday night. Bert Collins was to have been here, but he's down with influenza. You're the very man to take his place."

Shackleford shook his head.

"I'm not up to it," he said. "And with all I have to do it would be foolish—"

"Nonsense! You've told me yourself, dozens of times, that after working hard for a week or two a touch of folly does you good. You don't have to drink if you don't want to. The girls will cheer you up. Nice youngsters, both of them. No strain on the intellect. Two minds without a single thought—two hearts that beat for fun. You'll enjoy them, I know. And it may keep you out of more serious mischief. Just tell the young

ladies about your new book. They may provide you with some delightful illustrations. And of course, if you decide to demonstrate any of your pet theories, they might even be willing to lend you a certain amount of coöperation."

Shackleford considered. Hard work for many days had left him in a restless mood.

"Very well," he said. "I'll come."

Chapter 6: Adonis Lacks the Inclination

SHACKLEFORD had not been at George Avery's party more than half an hour before he began to wonder why he had come.

It was not that he found the two girls disappointing—to the eye, at least. He had rarely seen a more beautiful creature than the one who seemed destined for him. But they spoke a strange and at times almost incoherent language, which he was not in the humor to understand, or at least to appreciate.

Both were quite young—scarcely over twenty, he thought—so far as their graceful bodies were concerned; their minds, in certain ways, seemed older than his—older than any man's mind could ever hope to be—older than time. His dinner partner—the one called Betty—was

tall and invitingly slender, with smooth, sloping shoulders and very youthful, *retroussé* breasts. Her short, copper-blonde hair, lightly waved, made her face seem childishly small—almost immature. The other, whom George presented as Carol, was a slim and nervously vivacious brunette, whose over-large eyes and tiny scarlet mouth gave one the impression of features curiously topsy-turvy. They made their appearance in the hall, after a giggling visit to one of the bedrooms to take off their wraps, by sliding down the banisters, one on either side, at break-neck speed, and landing upon the floor in a swirl of gleaming flesh and *lingerie*.

George said, "Carol is mine by special request. You draw the blonde." . . . "Always *was* lucky," the girl murmured in a voice which also seemed blonde. . . . She stared at Shackleford appraisingly. . . . "My friend may not look it," George went on, "but he's a god—claims to be at any rate." Shackleford had told George about his little comedy at Mrs. Duane's. "*My* God!" the blonde girl said in mock adoration, throwing her arms about his neck. The brunette giggled. "George is a perfect devil," she said, with

a quick smile. "I like them that way. You can do more with—devils." . . . "Whoops, my dear!" the other girl cried. "Look out, George—she'll have you jumping through them yet." George grinned complacently. Not much about him to suggest either god or devil, Shackleford thought, with his thinning blond hair, his small blue eyes lighting narrowly a pink and somewhat pear-shaped face. Despite his boasts, George Avery displayed a tendency toward stoutness, about the waist, the jowls, which was not becoming: his eyes, too, were puffy—more so than they had been when Adonis had seen him last. Health, he had declared, was not a thing to be kept locked in a box. Shackleford thought he would prefer to spend his own more intelligently. The girls were demanding drinks. "Get yourself in a huddle, George," the brunette cried, "and signal Yokohama to hurry up with the cocktails!"

A Japanese butler, suave and inscrutable, arrived with a tray. Shackleford saw no other servants about the large house. The blonde girl was sitting on his lap, tempting him to kiss her. "I shall call you Venus," he said. She stared at him. "Where do you get that Venus stuff?

My name's Betty." . . . "Mere force of habit," he smiled. "To me, all women are—Venus. To most men, I think. They just can't help it." The girl still stared. "Say, you ought to broadcast that line. Somebody would pay you real money for it. . . . Don't be afraid you'll hurt me. I'm no unattacked virgin, even if I *do* know when to say when." She leaned over and kissed him, making quite a long and skillful performance of it, then relaxed in his arms, her lips still pressed against his. The brunette, drinking a second cocktail with George Avery at the other end of the room, looked at them and laughed. "You two seem strangely quiet over there," she said. The blonde girl sat up. "We've been having a very intimate conversation. Actions speak louder than words, you know." . . . "Touching!" her friend commented, sipping her drink. "You certainly said a mouthful." Shackleford held out his empty glass. The blonde girl jumped from his lap, went to get the shaker. "Nice little dump you have here, George," she said. "Why have you refused all my many invitations to come and visit you?" . . . He refilled the glasses, smiling

into her eyes. "I'll see that it never occurs again, baby-doll. The house is yours."

The girl called Carol winked. "He hands them all the same line. What about that Mrs. Allen you had here the other night, George? You gave *her* the whole works too, didn't you? Made her feel perfectly at home?" . . . "I haven't seen her since." George protested. The girls exchanged amused glances. . . . "And you look so well, too," the brunette laughed.

Shackleford got up and joined them. On the table was a large Sheffield tray containing *hors d'œuvres*—caviar, anchovies, cheese and bacon on toasted crackers. The blonde girl fed him stuffed celery. He kissed her again: it seemed the obvious thing to do, and his second cocktail had stimulated him to a mild interest. Shackleford did not lack experience with women, but it usually required something beyond the mere stark beauty of youth to engage his attention; something more subtly and deeply alluring. To his surprise, the girl, instead of meeting his advances as she had done before, remained quite impassive. It piqued his interest.

"I thought we had met somewhere," he said, "but that kiss was quite unfamiliar."

She stared at him insolently. "What do you want with it?" she asked. "A letter of introduction?" The dark girl, who had noticed the by-play, winked. "You'll learn about sex from her," she said. "That baby's taken a complete course in a co-respondent's school." Shackleford wondered, while he laughed, whether this could possibly be the girl who was responsible for Mrs. Avery's sudden visit to Paris. This attractive but brainless child! It seemed incredible, but then—life was incredible, at times. He declined a third cocktail.

The girl dragged him back to his chair, took her former place upon his lap.

"George tells me you're an author," she said. "What do you do for a living besides write books?"

"Not much." He laughed into her eyes. "I've tried being a god, as George informed you, but I'm afraid I'm not much good at it. So difficult to live up to the part."

The girl stared at him, uncomprehending, a puzzled frown about her eyes. Apparently her

small and youthfully direct brain held no room for whimsicalities.

"Where do you live?" she asked.

"On Mount Olympus—part of the time."

"Mount Olympus? What's that—your home town?"

"Oh, no. Olympus isn't a town. Not even a city."

"What is it, then?" she persisted.

"I think you might call it a classical state of mind."

The girl shook her head.

"You sure have a funny line," she laughed. "But you're—sweet." . . . "Say, Carol"—she shrieked across the room—"meet the big sugar and spice man from Mount Olympus! Olympus, B. C., I guess. . . . He may not have any sugar but his spice am hot!" She turned back to Shackleford. "I think you're a nutmeg, dearie, with the accent on the nut. What makes you so different, somehow?"

"Some of my friends tell me it's a matter of technique."

"I think you're just naturally goofy. Born

that way, I guess, and been getting worse ever since."

"Better, I'm told, in certain respects." He laughed.

"Well, you seem awfully cold to me. One of these iron men. Works by electricity and all that. . . . Have a heart, can't you?"

Shackleford swept her into his arms and kissed her. Intimately. "*Now* say it," he laughed. The girl gave a long, startled gasp. "I had you wrong, I guess," she whispered. "Let me hold your hand. After *that,* somebody's got to, or I shan't feel safe."

Carol was drinking her fifth cocktail.

"For God's sake, George," she cried. "What's wrong with this picture? Has anyone shot the cook? I'm hungry. I see now why they call you a lady-killer. You starve 'em to death!"

The butler came to the door, announcing dinner. Betty jumped up, her eyes no longer puzzled.

"You and I have got to get better acquainted, sweetheart," she laughed. "I've been looking for you all my wasted young life."

They went into the dining room, the two girls

healthily and frankly hungry. Shackleford rather regretted that he did not feel such an impatient interest in food.

His attempts, at later moments, to paint a mental picture of the dinner resulted only in confused recollections. His confusion did not arise from the two cocktails he had drunk, nor from the plentiful champagne which followed them. His mind was quite clear. But the rapid and discordant clatter over the dinner table left him with no very definite impressions. George Avery told a great many *risqué* stories; they were part of his social equipment. He carefully wrote down all the new ones he heard, in a book. Some of his tales were crudely amusing; a few had real wit. The girls laughed at them uproariously, pouring down champagne. Shackleford racked his brain but was not able to think of any very amusing stories himself: he heard many, but was rarely able to remember them. George, however, rose to the occasion so superbly, and with such evident enjoyment, that his own failure made no real difference.

The girl called Betty talked a great deal about the men who were attentive to her. She became

enthusiastic in her description of one of them—a boy, she called him, whom she had met at a dance the night before. "He looked like a million dollars!" she giggled. "Talk about your personality, that kid's got everything a woman wants and then some! And oh—how—he—can—love!" She pressed a kiss upon the tips of her slender, tapering fingers, tossed it lightly into the air. Shackleford, catching her eye, cool and watchful, felt sure that the story was largely apochryphal, and had been told merely to stimulate his interest. As Mrs. Duane had told about *her* conquests, that afternoon over the tea table. Women were singularly alike, in their methods. Most women, at least. The expression turned his thoughts to Mrs. Darrow; he remembered how she had objected to the term, "most women," when applied to herself. The recollection suggested invidious comparisons; he was sure she did not belong in that category. In just what category she did belong was something he had not been able to decide.

Carol, the brunette girl, was teasing her blonde companion. "Your handsome boy friend didn't present you with any Rolls-Royces, did

he? Take it from me, little one, the only way to catch a millionaire nowadays is with live bait." She shot a quick glance at George. "Am I right, old dear? You've had enough experience to know."

Shackleford put his thoughts of Mrs. Darrow from him, drank another glass of champagne. It was absurd for him to be so silent; he owed something to the success of George's party. He did not, however, in spite of the latter's suggestions, make any reference to his book, but contented himself with relating an amusing experience he had had in Naples the year before—an experience in which the stupidity, or perhaps the cupidity, of a Neapolitan cab driver had brought him, and two very charming English girls, to a highly embarrassing situation. They had set out in search of the *tarantella*, and arrived at a house not maintained primarily for purposes of dancing, although, the vulture-faced Italian proprietress informed them, dances in any costume—or none—could be arranged—she recommended the Pompeian. He had taken one look about the red plush and mirrored apartment to which their cab-driving guide had brought them, and fled,

gladly giving the woman the hundred *lire* she demanded in return for having turned on the electric lights. He made a rather dramatic story of it; the others laughed. But he saw that the girl Betty was still regarding him with restless, speculative eyes.

They danced, after dinner, to music supplied by the radio. Shackleford enjoyed dancing and found the lack of need for conversation a relief. He did not feel like talking; it was an effort, to speak the *argot* these girls employed. His lack of interest annoyed him, at moments, although he laughed at himself for being annoyed. Of course they possessed no real intelligence, in spite of a certain cool shrewdness. Why expect it? He had played with such women before; entered into the spirit of their small chatter. He had no wish to seem superior, but—the amused and mocking face of Mrs. Darrow rose continually like a bright sun above the intellectually drab horizon of his surroundings. He could not escape her cool and challenging eyes.

The blonde girl pulled him to her side on a sofa. The perfume of her body was very sweet. Why spoil his evening, with thoughts of a woman

he scarcely knew—with whom he had exchanged barely a dozen words? What reason had he for supposing that *she* possessed any great intelligence, any intellectual charm? Her appeal to him had been primarily physical; he admitted that, although he realized quite well how dull such an appeal may be, with no beauty beyond that of the flesh to enliven it. This young girl might have more to offer than he had granted her; she sat quietly at his side making no effort to attract him.

"Snap out of it, can't you?" she finally said. "I'm still here."

He took her in his arms, felt her eager response to his kisses. "You sure have S. A.," she whispered against his cheek. "I thought maybe you'd forgotten me."

George had induced the brunette girl to dance. She had taken off her dress. Her two isolated bits of *lingerie* were mauve, covered with small elephants. "What's the use of having expensive underwear if you can't show it," she laughed. "Not ready to take the veil?" George asked. "Not yet, old dear. Not a bride's or widow's, at any rate. The kind Salome used are better suited

to my style." She began to dance, beautifully, seductively, indecently, a frank enacting of the sex drama in the modern, New Orleans *levee* manner. Her appeal was entirely to George; she played the drama with him, up to the point at which he lifted her in his arms, carried her off, laughing, to the sun porch. "The house is yours, children," he called back from the large, unlighted room.

The blonde girl stared at Shackleford. She said nothing, but he saw that the pupils of her eyes were dilated; she was still regarding him with her peculiar, speculative gaze.

"Suppose we go out to the pergola," he said. "I'd like some air."

The girl's eyes narrowed, but she assented with a nod. "I'll have to get my coat." She went to the foot of the staircase, turned. "My, what a big house, with nobody in it. I'm afraid to go upstairs—alone."

At first Shackleford thought of refusing, but it seemed a childish, ill-natured thing to do. He went up the stairs with her, her arm about his waist. The room was at the end of the upper hall; a guest room, palpably. The girl, instead of

getting her coat, threw herself on the day bed, leaned back against the cushions. "I'm tired," she said. "Up too late last night." Shackleford thought of his story of Venus, the one he had told Sylvia Duane. Would he be asked, again, to search for an arrow's wound?

"Sit down." The girl patted the bed beside her. "Why won't you be nice to me? When I said I knew when to say when, I didn't mean . . . that sometimes . . . I mightn't be . . . absent-minded . . . and forget. . . ."

Shackleford stood looking down at her. The heavy silence of the house seemed alive, expectant, unbroken except by the girl's almost inaudible breathing—mere shadow of a sound—the faint rustle of her silk dress, as her body moved imperceptibly beneath it. He did not want this girl, although it annoyed him, childishly, to admit it. Perhaps the very frankness of her appeal repelled him. Men always preferred to imagine themselves the pursuers. Still, desire was not a thing you could dish up, serve on a platter like boiled potatoes. He remembered crazily that the girl's kisses, the ones she had given him on the sofa a few moments before, had reeked of the

food she had eaten, of stale champagne. No doubt his own had, as well, but—passion was more than a mere animal impulse; he thought of it as something keen and vivid and beautiful, between two persons who were both mentally and physically mated, the only kind of mating that finally mattered, when all was said and done. How could he tell her?

She did not wait for him to tell her. His silence was eloquent enough. She got to her feet, laughed, a queer, discordant laugh.

"I'll write home to my dear old grandmother," she said, "what beautiful care you've taken of me! Virtue its own reward and everything. Damn you!" She struck him across the face. "What did you come up here for? I didn't want you!" She snatched her coat from the back of a chair, felt in one of its pockets for a handkerchief. Tears of anger, stained with mascara, rolled muddily down her cheeks; in her fury she was not attractive—the self-revealing fury of a woman scorned. "Go away! I don't want you!"

Shackleford went down the stairs, found George prowling in the buffet for a drink.

"I've had an argument with our blonde friend," he said. "I'm going home."

George eyed him curiously.

"Turned you down, eh? That's queer. Carol said she was a good sport."

"Yes—she turned me down, George. She's a nice child, but she doesn't like me. Can you see that she gets wherever she's going?"

"I'll attend to it. She'll go with Carol. Sorry things turned out the way they did. Join me?" He held up a decanter.

"Thanks. I believe not. Do you think this girl would accept any money? Just a little present, you know—" He took some notes from his pocket.

"Forget it. These women aren't looking for money. Not that kind of money, at any rate, although they'd neither of them object to having somebody pay their bills. It will probably surprise you to know that that blonde girl's father earns a large salary. Funny, the way parents allow their kids to run wild, nowadays."

"It is indeed," Shackleford said. "Good-night. And George—when she comes down, tell her I liked her tremendously, will you?"

Shackleford went home through the woods, breathing in huge gulps of the sweet-smelling air. It amused him to picture wood nymphs dancing in every shadow, dryads lurking behind every tree.

Beauty, without brains! he mused. What a feeble appeal it made, at least to a man with any imagination. Then, remembering his harlequinade in Mrs. Duane's garden he laughed aloud. As a nature god he was not living up to his reputation.

Book Two

Harvest

Chapter 7: June Magic

WHEN Shackleford came out of the house he found McQueen moving about the garden examining the newly-budded rose bushes. It was Sunday; the gardener wore a white collar and had just come from nine o'clock mass. His vividly red hair, his equally ruddy cheeks and moustaches, topping his long frame, somehow suggested a mighty torch, in flame.

"Good morning, sorr," he said. "A rare fine day for the first of June, sorr, and what with the birds chirping about and the sun smiling, and the flowers smelling so sweet and fresh it might well be the first day of the world."

"It might indeed, McQueen," Shackleford smiled, "and we the gods that made it. You believe in gods, don't you, McQueen?"

"In one, sorr."

"Not three?"

McQueen rubbed his fiery chin.

"Three then, sorr, if you wish to put it that way. 'Tis not me would be forgetting the Holy Virgin and her Blessed Son. But 'tis still one at that, sorr, in a manner of speaking."

"A mystery," Shackleford said, "which to me has never been quite clear."

"It may take a bit of explaining, sorr," McQueen went on placidly, "but I give it no thought. If those who read the good books are satisfied, why should the likes of me be pestering the Heavenly Father on his high and mighty seat with foolish questions. After all, sorr, 'tis no more of a mystery than this rose." He laid a loving finger upon one of the young and swelling buds.

"You are right, McQueen," Shackleford said. "No more."

"And whether we understand it or not, sorr, 'tis a small matter. The sunshine will be as bright and warm on the hillsides, and the rain fall as softly in the dells, whatever the likes of us may think."

Shackleford sat down on one of the iron garden benches.

"I admit the force of your argument, McQueen," he said. "And I begin to think that after all, we worship the same gods. But it was not about the high great ones of Olympus that I meant to ask you, but the little people who live and play in the woods. You believe in them, I'm sure."

"Well now, sorr, as to that I can't rightly say, although I've seen them."

"But surely, if you've seen them—"

"I have learned, sorr, 'tis not safe to believe in everything one sees. I remember the time when I was a bit of a lad in the old country, where the world seems small and younger than it does here, the fairies got into the churn and put such a spell on it we could get no butter at all, sorr, for a matter of three whole days. Then on the night, my mother put out a dish of cream for the little people, on a stone before the door, and I watching through the crack of it with gooseflesh running up and down the broad of my back, so frightened I was at the sight of them, chattering and dancing there as merry as you please under the moon. But I have never laid eyes on them since, sorr, and it may be it takes

the eyes of a boy to see such sights and that when we grow older we get to be a little blind."

"It is a pity," Shackleford said, "to grow older."

"And I mind the time," McQueen went on, "when I was strolling through the hills of Kerry one night, with a little new moon over my shoulder, and a slip of a girl on my arm, and the grass all wet and sweet-smelling with the dew, and she told me she saw a queer small man with a three-cornered hat and green buttons on his coat, sitting on the stump of a tree and pegging away at a pair of new red shoes. She knew them to be wedding slippers, she said, the minute she clapped her eyes on them, and told me to look close, but I could not see the leprechaun at all. Then Mary laughed and said I was blind as a bat, but I was not too blind to see the light of her eyes, nor the red lips of her mouth when I kissed her. 'Tis the same is the mother of my boys, sorr—two red-headed young devils you may have seen at their mischief hereabouts."

"I have seen them, McQueen," Shackleford laughed, "and a fine pair of young devils they are. And now I know, man, from what you tell

me, that we do indeed worship the same gods, and those two youngsters are the living proof of it—more power to you. McQueen, I have it in mind to ask you a question. Do you know a beautiful lady who lives in the neighborhood by the name of Mrs. Darrow?"

"I do indeed, sorr, and a very fine lady she is. If these same young devils I was speaking of have anny manners at all, 'tis what she has taught them, taking them two or three times a week for long walks in the woods. They think her a royal queen, no less, sorr, and maybe a fairy godmother as well, what with the presents they do be getting from her, at holiday times and such."

"She has then, I judge," Shackleford inquired gravely, "no children of her own."

"None, sorr, and my wife and I often speak of the pity of it, and she such a fine and upstanding woman who could give such fine and upstanding children to the world. Manny's the time I've seen her, driving to the church of a Sunday morning, looking so small and lonesome in her big shiny car."

"What church does she go to, McQueen?"

Shackleford asked, rising quite suddenly from the bench.

"The Episcopal church, on Grant Avenue, sorr. Saint Martin's, they're after calling it, although which one of the blessed saints he may be I can't—" But Shackleford had already reached the door which led to his study.

"I think I shall go to church myself this morning, McQueen," he called back.

The little people were still working their potent magic.

Chapter 8: Idols

SHE was sitting at the rear of the church, when Shackleford came in, with people all about her; he was obliged to go further up the aisle in order to find a seat. He did not think that she had seen him but when the service was over and he had come out through the little covered vestibule, he found her waiting at the edge of the grass. The dark suit she wore made a foil for her bright coloring; she seemed smaller, more slender in it, more as he had remembered her in her huntress costume at Mrs. Duane's dance. "Diana," he murmured to himself, wondering for whom she was waiting; it did not cross his mind at all that she might be waiting for him.

"Since you are without a car," she said, as he came up to her, "I thought you might like to have me drive you home."

Shackleford put out his hand, astonished. Her

slow and brilliant smile made him feel suddenly, pleasantly warm—glowing.

"Thanks—very much," he replied, still a trifle confused as they walked across the grass.

"I'm amazed to see *you* here," she said.

"Why?"

"A pagan? A worshipper of heathen idols—"

" 'Plucky lot she thought of idols,' " Shackleford quoted to himself. "Who told you I was a pagan?"

"You admitted it that afternoon at Mrs. Duane's. A believer in nature gods—"

"And the God who made nature," he added.

"Really? He *will* be pleased." There was cool irony in her voice.

"But not," Shackleford went on steadily, "in the jealous and rather petulant tribal deity of the Hebrews. These smug and smiling parsons who appear to be on such intimate terms with the Almighty make the mistake of viewing the Creator through the wrong end of their telescopes. No wonder they see only a little tin god, looking very much like their own small and human selves."

They had reached her car now, a powerful

machine of foreign make, but a press of other automobiles toward the church door blocked the road: they were obliged to wait for several minutes before it was clear.

Shackleford still felt the sting of her earlier irony.

"If I *am* a worshipper of idols," he said, "I do not appear to be alone in my wickedness. The minister accused the entire congregation of the same sin." The text of the sermon had been, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," and the discourse had undertaken to show how the sinful and worldly cherish such images in their hearts—idols of gold adorned with much purple and fine linen, idols of brass, with feet of clay. "I suppose you think the ones I seem to worship out of place in such a gathering," Shackleford went on, "but you are wrong. If you have read your Bible, you may remember that Jacob set up a pillar as a sign and witness to Jehovah, and poured oil upon it, and called the place Beth-El, which means The House of God. That stone tower of the church means no less. A symbol of divinity since the dawn of history."

"I've always thought of paganism as shockingly immoral," Ann said.

"Almost everyone has that idea. It really wasn't. The ancient peoples were very reverent in their worship. The prayers of a Phœnician woman, begging her god of fruitfulness for children, were quite as pure and moral as any prayers could be today. After all, I can imagine less sensible things than a worship of the great reproductive force in nature—the divine source of all life. It was that, of course, and not their towers and Maypoles and obelisks the people worshipped."

"Curious," Ann said, "how the Maypole custom has survived."

"Isn't it? I suppose, after freezing in unheated caves all winter, the coming of spring, with its rebirth, its rejuvenation of Nature, *did* seem a miracle to those simple peoples. I don't wonder they made a festival of it, and offered sacrifice to the creative forces which made all their world go on. They wouldn't have understood you if you had told them their ideas were immoral, their Maypoles an emblem of sin." Shackleford

shrugged his shoulders. "I hope I'm not boring you."

Ann Darrow regarded him with grave and thoughtful eyes.

"What you have told me is extremely interesting," she said. "As it happens, I'm not very orthodox myself."

"Then you don't belong here?" Shackleford nodded toward the small stone church. "I shouldn't want to tread on anyone's religious corns."

"No. I'm quite broadminded, in my views. But I enjoy the service, the music. I believe in God, of course. And a hereafter. But I'm afraid that wherever I finally end up, I shall have to get there in my own way. I shouldn't care to be just one of an ecclesiastically conducted Cook's tour."

"I like that," Shackleford smiled. "Neither should I. Most people are such—sheep."

"Perhaps it's just as well. We can't all be shepherds, you know. Or strays. We must have our idols, in one form or another. And speaking of idols, my husband has one. An elephant's head."

Shackleford glanced at her in surprise. It was the first time she had spoken of her husband; he did not understand what she meant.

"An elephant's head?" he asked.

"Yes." She had maneuvered the car into the main road, now, and was driving in the direction of the Bartlett place. "He does a lot of hunting —big game shooting, you know. The year after we were married we went out to East Africa. Elephant hunting. One day, following a small herd, he came head on, you might say, into a female suckling her calf. The beaters were all so surprised, terrified, they ran away. You may know what a cow elephant is, defending her young. He shot, twice, three times, before he got a bullet behind her ear. She was right on him, then, one of her tusks tearing into his shoulder; the crash of her fall swept him down, too— stunned him. They thought he was dead, but he sprang up, laughing. My husband is a very fearless man. The head of that elephant, a huge thing, hangs over the fireplace in his library. I call it his idol because he has a habit of sitting there in his chair, when he is at home, staring at it. For hours. Worshipping it, you might say."

"But—just what is he worshipping?" Shackleford asked.

"Why—his own courage, I suppose. The fearlessness that made him stand there, when the others had run. An enraged female elephant is a terrible and deadly thing. I don't suppose he ever thought of the beast's side of that struggle—the mother instinct that made her attack him, defend her young. She was his enemy, cruel, vicious. He fought her—hating her because she tried to kill him. I think he hates her yet. That is why he sits there—gloating. Over the victory he won. Reliving those moments—glorying in them. Worshipping himself."

She spoke calmly, almost casually, and her words implied no criticism of her husband. It was as though she recognized his perfect right to worship himself. But the picture Shackleford received was not a pleasant one. He thought of a man supremely selfish, and wondered whether or not she realized that she had given him that impression.

"He is away now," she said evenly. "In Indo-China. He is away a great deal."

Shackleford was tempted to ask how a man

could possibly leave so attractive a woman—why he did not take her with him, but he saw it would involve an obvious compliment and she had told him she detested compliments. The car stopped.

"Here is the lodge," she said.

He felt that they had only begun to talk. He wanted to continue their conversation.

"Are you going home now?" he asked.

"No." She darted a quick, almost amused glance at him. "It's only half-past twelve. I dine at two, on Sundays, in the country. I shall probably drive for an hour yet, at least. I enjoy the air."

"So do I," Shackleford laughed. "Mightn't we enjoy it together?"

She considered, her eyes smiling.

"This is a small place," she presently said. "I have been talked about a great deal because I usually prefer to be alone. People always talk about anything you do that is different from the things *they* do. So here everyone talks about my —exclusiveness. They probably have another name for it, which doesn't matter to me at all. But you can see, the moment I depart from my normal habits, they will talk about that, too. Just

because I have *not* gone about much with any man here, they will read into it, the moment I do, a peculiar and disagreeable significance. If I am seen driving you to Tanner's Point and back, which is where I usually go on Sunday mornings, every old woman of either sex in the place will be attacked with the most excruciatingly painful curiosity. Their nice family dinners will be hopelessly spoiled." Shackleford saw the mockery in her eyes. "They will talk about you, my dear man, too. Shockingly. I thought I had best warn you in advance. Most men—"

"What have I done?" he laughed, "to be classed with 'most men'? Drive on, James. We go to Tanner's Point."

Mrs. Darrow drove expertly, all her movements very swift and certain. She did not speak again for some time. Shackleford had no idea of what she might be thinking.

"How did you know I would be at St. Martin's this morning?" she suddenly asked.

"McQueen told me."

"Have you been discussing me with McQueen?" Her cheeks flamed.

"Oh no! He was telling me how nice you are to his children."

"They are nice children." Her quick anger went as it had come, a fire of straw. "Real children. If I had ever had any of my own, I should have wanted them above all things to be real." Her unusual choice of tenses somehow conveyed the idea that for her there could never be any children. Shackleford was puzzled by it.

"I'm sure they will be," he said.

"No. My husband doesn't want children. He has an unusual mind. I don't believe he enjoys —creating things. His pleasure seems to lie in destroying them. You've no idea how he loves to kill. It's a mania with him. He keeps a record —a sort of score—of all the things he shoots—like that cow elephant. So many of this, so many of that, carefully put down in a book. Tigers, elephants, mountain goats, giraffes, monkeys, deer—even ducks. This day's bag so many—so many the next—mallards, canvas-backs—red heads. Thousands and thousands of them. It's queer, to want to destroy life instead of creating it, but I suppose all game hunters are

like that. He thinks *I'm* queer, not to feel as he does."

They came after a time to Tanner's Point, a crooked arm thrust out into the sea as though embracing it, with a whitewashed stone lighthouse at its tip. The wide sweep of ocean was deep blue against the thinner, hotter blue of the sky: within the point the water lay mauve and purple, and clear yellow-green where it curved and broke in feathery foam on the sand. They sat breathing in the strong air, heavy with the rich, salt odors of the sea.

Ann Darrow suddenly laughed, not a very gay laugh, Shackleford thought.

"I've talked more to you about my affairs," she said, "than I have to anyone, since my marriage. You probably think I *am* queer. I didn't mean to criticize my husband. One doesn't criticize a man for being a big-game hunter, you understand. But I felt sorry for that cow elephant—sorry for its calf that had to be killed. My husband said if I was going to be sentimental about a damned beast that nearly killed him, he'd never take me on one of his shooting trips again. He never has."

"I've hunted a bit," Shackleford said. "A man likes the risk of it—the danger."

"There are things you can hunt with plenty of danger, if that's what you want, without the need of killing. Unless it might be yourself."

"Women, do you mean?" asked Shackleford, smiling.

"I was thinking of mountain peaks. And edelweiss."

"Oh, yes. I've tried that, too. In the Alps." He had almost broken his neck, once, climbing over high slippery rocks for the small, pure-white snow-blossoms.

"Those who hunt edelweiss," Ann Darrow said very slowly, "must be prepared to climb dangerously—and high." He met her eyes; he liked the quick grey blaze of them—very frank —challenging. "We'll have to go back now." She turned the heavy car about, smoothly, skillfully. Shackleford wondered just what she had meant; he could read a meaning into her words which might apply to himself—to anyone with courage to dare the heights on which she stood. He felt very certain she stood alone.

She said: "They don't like me much, in this

town. There are a great many evil-minded men going about, with their moral collars buttoned up in the back. Hypocrites! They'd love to tear me to pieces with their cruel, eager fingers. Like beasts. Or kill the joy in me with their cold, clammy minds."

Shackleford reached out his hand, placed it over one of hers as it gripped the steering wheel.

"You must never let anyone kill the joy in you," he whispered. "It's too rare—too precious."

She laughed, the color lighting her cheeks quickly, like a sudden flame. But her eyes were still cool, baffling.

"I'm afraid of men," she said. "They are always—seeking—"

"I could not believe you afraid of anything. Not of any man, certainly."

"Just—men, in general. I like children—better. McQueen's are such darlings. The most perfect little devils—pagans—"

"Raised in the bosom of the church?"

"Like their elders, they slip off their garment of religion without much trouble, along with their Sunday clothes. But when I say pagans, I

mean it very cleanly—joyously. You should know them better. Just the realest, most divinely natural things in the world. Adoring the sunshine, the trees, the flowers, the grass,—and their own naked clean little bodies. So sweetly, humanly clean. Friends with all the small, wild animal things that play in the woods. Children of nature. Gods."

"And you, Diana, the moon goddess," he whispered, "teaching them forest lore. It was as Diana I first saw you, you know—and shall always think of you. Diana the huntress. Do you mind if I call you that? Diana?"

"And what do you think I am—hunting?" she asked, ignoring his question.

"Love, perhaps."

"Really! Am I being psychoanalyzed?"

"Most people seek love, don't you think? In one way or another."

"What could I do with love, if I found it?" Her eyes, her voice again became cold—mocking.

"Cherish it. Close to your heart. It might warm you—"

"And burn. Deeply. Dreadfully. Consumingly."

"Sometimes it burns away—hate."

"My dear man!" She laughed, a light, unconvincing laugh. "What makes you think I hate anyone?"

"Merely an impression, which I suppose I have no possible right to express. But I am sure that if you *do*, it is an instinctive subconscious hatred, quite without any intent on your part. A hatred of someone who has hurt you very deeply."

"In what way, may I ask—admitting for the moment that you are right."

"By denying you something you very much want."

"What do you mean?"

"Children," Shackleford said. "Children like McQueen's. They would be your—idols."

She looked at him eagerly, searchingly. He thought there was sudden hunger in her eyes.

"You are wrong," she said. "Quite wrong. I need more. More than children, although they may be a part of it. More than love—what most

people call love. Something deeper. More fundamental. Something for myself."

"Do you care to tell me what it is?" Shackleford asked.

"I can't. I can't tell you. Even though you, because you are—you—might understand." She stared at the road ahead. Her fingers, on the steering wheel, gripped it so tightly that they were drained of blood—white. They drew up at the lodge gate. Shackleford got out, stood for a moment beside the throbbing car.

"When may I see you again?" he said.

"Does it matter?" She challenged him with her slow smile.

"Doesn't it?" His eyes held hers, questioning.

"I'll stop by, some day," she said evenly. "With the McQueen children. They are inquisitive devils, and have been asking me all sorts of intimate and personal questions about you."

"I shall be very happy," Shackleford whispered, "to answer them."

"I wonder." She laughed and drove off quickly, waving her hand.

Chapter 9: Sapphic Interlude

IT was late: Shackleford had just laid aside his manuscript when he heard a motor car drive up before the lodge door. It was a large and shining car, as he was able to determine quite readily by glancing through the open window of his study; it was not, however, the car for which he had hoped. As he turned from the window he seemed to hear the soft contralto tinkle of a laugh.

The week had been a busy one. Six days of uninterrupted work lay behind him. Mrs. Darrow and the McQueen children had not appeared. He would have welcomed their advent gladly, but there had been thunder showers on several of the afternoons, which had doubtless interfered with their woodland excursions.

Mrs. Curlett was bringing in a handsome, grey-haired gentleman, with a bearded face and a large and very prominent nose.

"Mr. Kuhns to see you," she announced. Shackleford put out his hand, at the same time closing the study door.

"Welcome, my dear Pan," he chuckled. "This is a most pleasant surprise."

The bearded gentleman shook hands, sank smiling into a chair.

"From your classical manner of greeting me," he said, "I judge you have been studying mythology."

"I have." Shackleford grinned. "Deeply. And my studies convince me that while you may consider that thing you are wearing a nose—"

"What is wrong with it?" The grey-haired gentleman raised an inquiring finger. "It is a Roman nose and has been greatly admired. I trust you have not by any chance been drinking."

"From the well of knowledge only. And I am led to believe that the nose of Pan was originally Greek."

"Even so, it is not a thing of which I need feel ashamed." The bearded gentleman's eyes began to twinkle.

"On the contrary, it is an organ of which any man might well be proud. But just the same,

should some of these delightfully bucolic villagers hereabouts come upon you suddenly, they might, like one I could name, insist upon your wearing a figleaf."

The gentleman in the chair shook with laughter.

"My dear boy," he said, "your whimsical sense of humor delights me. You refer, I suppose, to my neighbor, Mr. Duane."

"I do."

"A simple soul. In love with the conventions. But you are wrong about my nose. Its greatest virtue, if I may use the term, lies in the fact that it *is* so obvious, and therefore quite unlikely to attract attention. No matter how fully you may appreciate its delightful significance, nobody else is going to see anything out of the way in it at all."

"One of the advantages, I suppose, of not having a classical education."

"Precisely. The general public has been so carefully schooled *not* to see the actual facts of life, even when they are as plain and obvious as the nose on my face, that without some such device as a figleaf to attract their attention, they

refuse to discuss them, and even go so far as to deny their actual existence."

"True," Shackleford laughed. "Only a few years ago no respectable woman could be guilty of possessing such things as legs, or breasts—in the plural sense, at least—although they were granted a breast. Now nobody pays any attention to them."

"Which shows progress, at least, my dear fellow. But while we now have allowed women those very useful and attractive members, it is still not good form to admit their possession of anything else of an anatomical nature not at once visible to the naked eye. As for men, to judge from the universal silence on the subject, anyone might suppose the human race to be entirely the result of some artificial and purely immaculate conception."

"I rather think," laughed Shackleford, "that most women would prefer a less hypothetical method."

"Probably. One more universally accepted, in private, if not in public." The bearded gentleman took a cigar from his pocket. "Your fancies, my dear Shackleford, are always amusing. I shall

never forget our month together, in Paris. But I did not come here to discuss sex questions with you, interesting as they may sometimes be. There is a certain matter in which I need your help."

"Not a sex question?"

"No. Not primarily, at least. I suppose all questions are sex questions, when they are not about something to eat. There is a certain friend of mine, a widow, named Aline Pennington—"

"Knowing you as I do, my dear Pan, I assume she is not only a widow, but also both young and gay. Your passion for antiques must have its limits."

"I am under certain obligations to the lady," Mr. Kuhns went on, his keen eyes singularly merry, "which are not to be repaid in cash. She is very beautiful. She thinks she has talent. She wants to go on the stage."

"Poor creature. What for? It's a dog's life. And most women are cats, much happier lying curled up in the sun."

"God knows. She has plenty of money. I've seen to that. Possibly she admires her beauty, and feels she should share it with the public."

"Then why not do it at the opera, or at the

races? There are so many more comfortable places than the stage. Or has she a yearning for the center of it?"

"I think she has. The spotlight. The brilliant entrance. The loud applause. We all crave it, in one way or another."

"And how can *I* help your charming friend to realize her ambitions?"

"That's just the question. I happened to mention to her, the other day, that I knew you—that you were down here for the summer. She's heard you have had some experience in the theatre so she asked me to bring you to dinner tonight."

"That's awfully kind," Shackleford said.

"I'd like to have you anyway, my dear chap. You understand that. And in this particular case, it will be a favor to me. You can't put her on the stage, I know. But you can talk to her—answer her questions, which is more than I can do. She isn't at all hard to talk to. I wish *I* were your age."

Shackleford considered. He had met this gay and childless widower abroad: they had played together most congenially for the better part of one summer. A *connoisseur* of other things than

women, his brilliant intellect, even more than his large wealth had served to give him a commanding position in the worlds of music and the arts. It was not easy to refuse his genial invitation, although the prospect of talking to a stage-struck woman was not particularly inviting.

"I'll come," he smiled, "provided I do not have to dress." He would have preferred crackers and cheese with Ann Darrow, had it been possible, but—he had heard nothing from her since Sunday, and had decided not to telephone her house.

"Good. It will be a very small party. Only four of us. We'll dine quite informally, in the garden. It will be cool there, with a pleasant view of the sea. I shall wear something thin and comfortable myself. It's far too warm to dress." He took out his watch. "Almost six. I'll sit here and smoke while you change. You won't be long?"

"Not over fifteen minutes," Shackleford said, and went up to put on a white linen suit.

The huge house amazed and delighted him. There was a music room a hundred feet long. The four of them, chatting over their cocktails in one

corner of it, seemed toy figures, set down in some great tapestry-lined box. The pipe organ, like an altar, was silent; the ladies, Mr. Kuhns explained, his eyes still smiling, had expressed a desire for jazz. Shackleford looked at the ladies. There were two of them. One, a Miss Payne, was rather handsome, in an unpleasantly masculine way: he had seen many men who might have envied her her masculinity, in outward appearance at least; have wished to look as much like a man as she did. Her suit, her flat shoes, the way she wore her short hair, her manner of speaking, of moving her hands, of smoking a cigarette were all essentially un-feminine; she paid no attention to anyone else in the room; her eager and luminous eyes rarely left Mrs. Pennington's face.

Aline Pennington was, Shackleford admitted, extremely beautiful. Her figure, a trifle too heavy for her height, made up in inviting curves for a certain lack in delicacy; her features were fine and regular, her mouth not over small, her blue eyes, he thought, a shade too close together. She seemed very proud of her beauty, particularly her beauty of body; her dress was designed to display

it bountifully. Her corn-colored hair had palpably been bleached. She appropriated him at once, and while the others were in the library, looking at some of Mr. Kuhns' rare books, sat very close on a divan, apparently determined to impress him with her charms. He was aware almost at once of a feeling of repulsion, although he could assign no reason for it. The woman was attractive enough, even though, he soon discovered, not particularly intelligent.

"You know Morrie quite well, don't you?" she asked.

"Not well enough to call him Morrie. Although I do sometimes speak of him as Pan. I think he rather enjoys being looked on as a god. That particular god, at any rate. It flatters him."

"That's funny!" the woman laughed. "Who'd ever think of Morrie as a god? Although he *has* promised to be an angel, so far as helping me go on the stage is concerned."

"Really?" Shackleford regarded her whimsically. "Now *I've* never thought of Pan as an angel, although I'm told he was, by some mistake of the early church, once made a saint. They did their best to preserve most of the local pagan

deities, you know, but Pan, while a god of parts, was in certain physical aspects rather too much for them; they were obliged to have him suppressed."

Mrs. Pennington stared.

"I haven't the least idea what you are talking about," she said. "Morrie told you, didn't he, that I wanted to go on the stage?"

"He did. And I asked him why. I don't wish to discourage you, but there are so many easier ways of making a living. Marriage, for instance—"

"Nonsense!" She laughed shrilly. "I've tried that. Twice. There's nothing to it. My last husband committed suicide, after a dreadful affair with one of my best friends. He treated me outrageously. You've probably read about it in the newspapers."

"No," Shackleford said. "I usually avoid such things. It's a pity so much dirty linen has to be washed in public."

"Do you think so?" The woman gave him a bright stare. "What a silly, old-fashioned idea! Nobody keeps family skeletons locked up in closets nowadays—they make such gorgeous publicity! And of course everyone wants publicity

—especially if they're going on the stage. You *will* promise to help me."

"I will certainly do anvthing I can, for Mr. Kuhns' sake."

"Not for mine?" She pressed her shoulder against him, giving off a sweet cloud of perfume —very thick and cloying and heavy with some animal sex-odor, civet, or musk. He looked down at her; the naked beauty of her shoulders leaped up at him and again he was conscious of that singular feeling of repulsion—a feeling he was still at a loss to understand. He suddenly remembered that she had asked him a question and he had not answered it.

"For yours, too," he murmured.

She seemed disappointed, but his failure to respond only caused her to move closer, her arms resting across his knee. He extricated himself sufficiently to light a cigarette. He had laughed at George Avery for pursuing wood-nymphs; there were some, he reflected, who did not wait to be pursued. Amorous and rather insatiable nymphs, in their desire to be loved—not likely to be satisfied by the sedate attentions of any one man, especially a man of Mr. Kuhns' age. His thoughts

were interrupted by the sudden appearance of Miss Payne. She stood at the door for a moment, watching them sullenly. Then she came and sat down on the divan beside Mrs. Pennington, put her arm affectionately through hers. The other woman turned, and the girl kissed her. "You're wonderful, tonight, Cleo," she said. A pet name, Shackleford supposed, since Mr. Kuhns had called her Aline.

Mrs. Pennington returned to her interrupted attack.

"Don't you think I have the looks to make a success? In a musical show, for instance?"

"The looks, certainly," Shackleford agreed. "Have you the voice?" he continued rather idly. The actions of Miss Payne interested him: she had withdrawn her arm from Mrs. Pennington's and turned herself about so that she now sat with her back to them, her legs, flung over the couch arm, swinging restlessly, her nervous fingers picking at its needlepoint covering. "Of course she has a voice," she declared, suddenly jumping up. "A splendid voice. Come over to the piano, Cleo darling, and I'll play an accompaniment for you." She stood before them, her feet rather wide

apart, like a man, her arms behind her back, her expression tense. Shackleford got up. "I think we'd better wait until after dinner," he said. A man in livery appeared at the door, announced that Mr. Kuhns would like them to join him in the garden.

It was so beautiful inside the pergola, that Shackleford stood for a moment, silent. The slim marble columns with their covering of vines, the brilliant table beneath, the flames of many candles in gold candelabra, making sharp points of yellow fire against the whiter fire of the moon, the stretches of ocean beyond, purple and silver etchings framed by tall black cedars and hedges of inky box, brought him up standing, an emotional lump in his throat. Mrs. Pennington drew him to a place beside her.

"Come to," she laughed. "Don't forget I'm still waiting to have you tell me just how to get on the stage."

He shuddered: the idea seemed absurd, grotesque. In such a setting, one should talk of rarer things. He glanced about the table, and thought of Ann Darrow—would have gone on thinking of her, but Mrs. Pennington gave him no rest.

Why could she not leave him to his thoughts? He met the eyes of Morris Kuhns, bent upon him in gentle entreaty and suddenly found himself talking—explaining in an endless stream of words the ways in which musical plays had their birth and being, the methods of assembling and producing them, their cost. It was all very stupid and pointless but he kept on because he found he was able, beneath the almost mechanical flow of words, to think of other things—things which seemed to him more important.

"Then you think the only way I can get on the stage is to buy my way on?" he heard Mrs. Pennington asking rather petulantly.

He sighed and went over it all again, step by step. To seek the leading *rôle* in a play already "set"—she had made it quite clear that only a leading *rôle* would satisfy her—was out of the question. Such matters were always arranged in advance, the "shows" were frequently "written around" a leading woman. Her only course was to have one written around herself. There would be needed a composer, a man to write the "book," another man to write the "lyrics," the songs. A director. A man to arrange the dances, the "num-

bers." A comedian, several perhaps, specialty dancers, a scenic artist, to design and build the scenery. Other experts, for costumes, lighting "effects." Altogether a complicated and costly business. A hundred thousand dollars might be required, and there was no assurance whatever that the play, after its "tryout," would gain admission to a New York theatre. A colossal gamble, really, with some complaisant "angel" to pay the bills. He did not use just those words, out of consideration for Morris Kuhns, but his meaning was clear: the picture he drew was not very encouraging. Mrs. Pennington apparently did not consider it a true picture.

"I've heard over and over," she said, "of people being put on the stage by—friends. Women without half my looks," she added complacently. Shackleford attempted to explain that experience had as much to do with the matter as looks—more perhaps, in many ways. The motion picture field, he suggested, might offer greater opportunities. But Mrs. Pennington did not think so; a woman she knew "in pictures" had told her she was too old. She thought this ridiculous, but it was nevertheless true that most of the screen

actresses were young girls, barely out of their teens. She still seemed convinced, when they rose from the table, that all Shackleford need do was introduce her to some prominent producer and she would at once be offered an important engagement. But she would not give him an opportunity to hear her sing, in spite of Miss Payne's urgings, and took him off for a stroll in the garden.

Shackleford, in spite of a superficial gaiety, was somewhat bored. His curious distaste for Mrs. Pennington had not diminished since dinner: as he walked between the rows of box trees with her, felt the leaning weight of her body against his, the close suggestive pressure of her thigh, he found himself thinking of women as simple and rather pathetic children, fishing for men with their eternal, but often so clumsily displayed bait. Not all women, of course, but so many. . . . He stopped to find they had reached a *cul-de-sac*—a bower of honeysuckle against a high stone wall. Mrs. Pennington swung almost mechanically into his arms.

"Kiss me," she whispered, her head thrown back, her eyes half-closed, her lips parted against

her small, even teeth, her bosom heaving. She was, he thought, a better actress than he had imagined; to have supposed otherwise would have been to give her credit for emotions he was quite sure she did not feel. In the theatrical atmosphere of the moment he kissed her, mechanically, without the least desire. To avoid causing her embarrassment by a refusal. She welcomed the kiss, devoured it, with quick little animal cries and bodily writhings and twitchings, sagging back against his arm so that he was obliged to exert considerable strength to keep her from falling.

Quick footsteps on the flagstone path told him they were not alone. Miss Payne suddenly appeared beside them. The anger in her face was tremendous. He felt certain that had she possessed a weapon she would have used it. On him. Mrs. Pennington was still moaning in a soft, rather unpleasant way; she had not yet seen Miss Payne, who was behind her. In an illuminating flash Shackleford suddenly understood why Mrs. Pennington had seemed repulsive to him. He took away his arm.

Miss Payne spoke, her voice thick with resentment.

"Cleo darling." She took the other woman almost roughly into her arms. "What do you mean —what do you mean? Do you want to break my heart?" There was florid anger in Mrs. Pennington's eyes, a half-defiant fear, but she said nothing. Miss Payne began to kiss her, and Shackleford, embarrassed, stepped away. But he still could not help hearing Miss Payne's strident voice.

"Don't you know I love you? You haven't any right! This man means nothing! I won't have you kissing him! I can't stand it! I love you, darling —darling—darling!" She fairly smothered Mrs. Pennington with her kisses. Suddenly she turned. Mr. Kuhns wished them to return to the house, she said; they were going to a near-by inn, to dance. Shackleford hurried up the walk, found his host still sitting at the table.

"I've got to go," he said. "Work, you know. I'll do what I can for Mrs. Pennington, but it isn't much. You know as well as I do what her chances are, without experience. Why don't you

send her to some good dramatic school? Unless, of course, you want to lose a lot of money."

Mr. Kuhns smiled, and it seemed to Shackleford that one of his eyelids drooped slightly.

"I promised to bring you," he murmured. "I wanted you to tell her the truth. From me, it would not have sounded so well. I am greatly obliged, my dear boy, and I hope to see you soon again. For a real talk. Women! Ach!" He spread out his hands in a helpless gesture. "They amuse me. Most of them would make love to the devil himself, if they thought they could gain anything by it. Most." He checked himself. "But not all. I want to get her to the Inn, because if I don't, she will insist on taking off all her clothes and parading about in a suit of lace pyjamas. It's a sort of mania with her, to show herself off."

"A mania with a very definite significance," Shackleford said, "as I suppose you know."

"Oh, yes." Mr. Kuhns nodded. "But—I am over sixty. A man of my age has to close his eyes occasionally—even if only in a wink." His smile was not very gay. "At least I need not be jealous of any men rivals. And ladies must always be satisfied my dear fellow, in one way or another,

or there is no living with them. I do the best I can."

They left Shackleford at the lodge. He sat for a time in his study, thinking. How far some of these moderns, he thought, had descended from the gods. The religion of the pagans with its honest and virile sex worship, seemed clean and refreshing after the miasmic atmosphere from which he had just emerged. He felt like taking a bath. A marked passage in one of the books he had been reading arrested his attention. "To term the religion of these ancient peoples obscene is merely to cast the shadow of our own grossness and ignorance across their patriarchal simplicity."

Chapter 10: The Fragile Crescent of the Moon

IT was dark in the garden. Shackleford did not realize that Ann Darrow had joined him until he saw her suddenly standing at his side.

"I couldn't bring the children," she said in smiling apology. "It was much too late. They'd gone to bed hours ago. And they *do* ask such embarrassing questions."

"It is a way children have," Shackleford said, getting to his feet.

"They insist on asking," Mrs. Darrow went on lightly, her voice very gay, "if I have fallen in love with you?"

Shackleford suddenly realized that his knees were trembling; he had been asking himself much the same question for the past hour. He stared at Ann's face; her features, outlined in

profile against the night sky had a quality almost mediaeval. He thought of some grave young nun, suddenly breathing the wild spring air—some pictured saint, regarding the world with a Mona Lisa smile. Her beauty seemed of an older, younger day, when minstrels sang beneath their ladies' windows, and men in dark armor rode the highways, and murder was done, for love's sake, with sanctuary in churches.

In spite of her presence, so sweetly, so dangerously close, it seemed incredible that she should be here, in the garden with him, because that was precisely what he had been wishing for the past hour. And Shackleford knew very well how seldom in life one's wishes are so magically granted. If some one of the sweet sisterhood of Venus had suddenly appeared—Mrs. Duane, for example—it would not have greatly surprised him; he had discovered long ago how given they were to pursuit. But Diana—he remembered then, and smiled with the remembrance, that Diana too, was a huntress, although not usually a huntress of men.

"Have part of my bench," he laughed. It was scarcely responsive to what she had just said

about the McQueen children and their questions, but he was wary of discussing with seriousness any topic so lightly introduced. "And what did you tell them?" His tone disclosed no more than amused interest.

"I told them," Ann Darrow said, "that I did not know. It is always a safe answer, don't you think?"

"I suppose it is—if safety is what one wants."

"There are worse things—" she smiled.

"There is also—edelweiss—"

"But the rocks. So perilously high." She took a cigarette from her vanity case and lit it, using a small patent lighter; the sudden flame against her face disclosed for an instant its shadows. They were curiously deep beneath the eyes, Shackleford noticed; her cheeks were drawn and pale. He noticed this the more, because of their usual bright color. It seemed to him also that her hand shook, as she held her cigarette. "And what have you been writing today?" she asked. "More interesting things about the ancient Greeks?"

"No. Today I have been writing poetry."

"Indeed! I didn't know that, among your other accomplishments, you were a poet."

"There are a great many things about me you do not know. Under certain conditions, all men are poets."

She did not inquire what those conditions were, for which he mentally thanked her. It was after all, a delight to talk to a woman who did not ask obvious questions.

"Tell me about it," she said, leaning somewhat listlessly against the iron back of the bench.

It was, Shackleford thought, a proper setting for poetry. All the June roses, under the blaze of a cloudless sun, had burst into sudden, odorous bloom. The squat bulk of the lodge, modestly retiring behind its screen of lilac and mock-orange bushes, was dark; Mrs Curlett was never slow in making her disapproving exit as soon as the dinner dishes had been washed. She held, Shackleford knew, a somewhat thinly-veiled contempt for writers; her husband had been the vigorous superintendent of a stone-quarry. There was light from the stars, but no moon, so that the shadows cast by the surrounding trees were

vague and nebulous. But the air all about them hummed with quick life, the life of growing things; the rustle of the heavy leaves seemed tender and caressing, the tree limbs seemed to reach out to one another, straining toward a closer embrace. Shackleford felt his own arms straining.

"There isn't much one can tell, about poetry," he said. "You just write it, if you feel that way, and there it is."

"Real poetry," Ann Darrow said, "is always about something."

"Or somebody. Perhaps merely an expression of one's thoughts. Or emotions. Usually emotions. Something that calls for expression. Something—glowing."

"Yes," she smiled. "I can understand that. Let me hear some of it. If you can remember—"

"I have been thinking," Shackleford said, "of love. And in a way, of the moon, which has much to do with love, and is also sacred to Diana—"

"I should like to hear your—thoughts."

"There were some lines." He quoted:

"See where the fragile crescent of the moon
Doth ride the pale attenuated sky.
Its silver horns point upward. Luna gives
Good omen to my love, O virgin queen—"

"That is very beautiful," Ann Darrow said, suddenly sitting up. "Tell me some more." He went on.

"Love is of deeds, not omens, foolish one,
Not to be gained nor held by vain consent
Of moon or stars or things celestial,
Nor with love philtres won. But be thou brave,
With courage hot to scale unscaled heights—"

"I think that, too, is very fine. And true," she whispered. "Is there more?"

"There is a great deal more," Shackleford said, "although I have not yet written it. The thing is really a play. When the—heroine—leaves the—hero, you know, in his—garden—until morning, he says:

"Tomorrow thou wilt come to me again?
Then must I climb the silent stairs of night
Alone, until with weary brain and heart
I stagger through the portals of the dawn
Into another day? Stay yet a while—"

Mrs. Darrow bent over and pressed her lips against one of the rose blossoms, causing its petals to fall to the ground in a soft white shower. She seemed very nervous, Shackleford thought, on wires; he was nervous himself, was filled with a constantly-increasing desire to take her in his arms, but some stronger impulse stopped him, some message, perhaps telepathic, from her brain to his, some vague impression that she was testing him. He knew and admitted to himself frankly, that this woman, ever since their first meeting, had exerted a tremendous influence upon him; it was because of her that his evening at George Avery's had been such a fiasco. He was not usually so straight-laced: he had told himself that the blonde girl he had met there had failed to attract him because she was dull, unintelligent, but he knew the real reason for his virtue had been his deep and excluding desire for someone else. Not merely a physical desire, although he admitted that side of it frankly enough, but something beyond that—a psychological desire, if such a thing could be, which had at times shaken him profoundly with physical passion,

and at times had left him strangely content in a world of dreams.

He regretted it all intensely, because he had not wished to fall in love with anyone, certainly not with another man's wife. He did not quite believe in love, in the usually accepted sense of the word, although he realized that at times, without apparent reason, there sprang into being between two people a deep and immediately-recognized need of each other, a sharp and insistent demand that throbbed in the blood with the harsh beat of tom-toms, and refused to be stilled —might never be stilled, not even between their own tempestuous breasts. It was something he had never experienced, up to now; it threatened to sweep aside all former experiences of his life with a violent hand; it was sweet, poignantly, terribly sweet, and because it was terrible, and promised to sweep aside even himself, he instinctively resisted it, and held his emotions in a hard, unemotional grip.

Mrs. Darrow spoke suddenly of Sylvia Duane, asked if he had seen her. Shackleford shook his head. She had talked with Sylvia, she said, the day before, had been asked to a bridge party,

but had declined. "I go out so little I am ashamed of myself," she laughed. "It isn't wise, to become such a hermit. You have your work". . . . "Yes," he admitted—"work does help". . . . He spoke of his evening at Morris Kuhns'. "He has a very real understanding of the best in music, in art, in spite of his weakness". . . . "Is it women?" she asked. "I've heard". . . . "Yes. But I do not believe he takes them very seriously. I sympathize with him." She seemed interested in that. "I've heard about you—your women," she said. "I suppose you don't take them very seriously, either". . . . "No," he replied—"not most women." They both laughed over the constantly recurring phrase. . . . "Perhaps, after all, my reputation, if you can call it that, is undeserved. Men who write—artists of any sort—are always made the heroes of a great many imaginary love affairs. There was a woman I met on the steamer coming over last year. We had a very mild flirtation. I hear she has been dramatizing herself to her friends ever since as one of my many—loves. It gives her a sort of luster, I suppose, to pose in her small town as more than an acquaintance of a man whose picture some-

times gets into the newspapers" . . . . "Sylvia is doing that." Ann Darrow laughed. "Rather unwisely, I'm afraid. She has led me to believe that she found you a very dangerous person, with whom no woman could possibly be safe—alone. I think she was trying to warn me against you. So I thought I had better come and find out for myself."

"Have you?" Shackleford asked. "You know each woman is sure to discover a different thing. What you might find, and what Mrs. Duane might find, could be as different as black and white, and still both be—true." He laughed shortly. "And even then, I might be as black as Mrs. Duane seems anxious to paint me, and as white"—he smiled over the word—"as I may appear to you, and still be, underneath, something entirely different. There are other hues"—he paused. . . . "Yes?" she asked, lightly. He went on, taking her own light tone. "I was about to say that one would scarcely care to be considered either black or white, when there are such vivid and more interesting colors one can think of—the warm red of wine, for instance, and the scarlet redness of a woman's lips, and the deep

rich crimson of one's heart's blood." He shook his head, as though to shake the fancies from his brain. "But such expressions are just figures of speech, not to be recommended for a quiet discussion between a lady and a gentleman in a quiet and respectable rose garden." He spoke quickly, annoyed that he could not hide his feelings, keep the harshness from his voice, and getting up went to the sundial at the center of the garden and began to knock the ashes from his pipe. He did not want her to go—it was terrifying to think that she must go, and yet he was quite sure that if she did not, in a very few moments, he would be holding her in his arms.

He saw her take out another cigarette and light it, saw again how pale her cheeks were, how her fingers trembled. Why was she holding him back? he wondered. Holding herself back? He knew she was holding herself back, although he did not understand her reasons. Suddenly he realized that she stood at the small open gate through which she had appeared so silently a short time before. The thought that she was going brought him swiftly to her, he was holding

out his arms, they extended themselves without effort, in spite of him, straining—

"Don't go," he begged, and then, in a brighter manner, "I hope my—similes—haven't frightened you away."

She drew the gate to, stood smiling at him over it, more beautiful, in her clear pallor than he had ever seen her. Her smile turned to a laugh, that mellow, contralto laugh that made his blood race.

"You haven't frightened me," she said. "Life frightens me, at times. Frightens all of us, I think. Even you. It is of life—and of ourselves, that we are most afraid. And I know now, my friend, that you are brave—"

Shackleford clutched the wooden top of the gate, tried to open it.

"What do you mean?" he asked. His cheeks were suddenly burning; he thought for a mad instant that she was laughing at him, that she had spoken ironically, but the steady gaze with which her eyes met his checked him.

"You asked me the other day if I had read the Bible," she said. "Not much perhaps, but enough to know that a man who conquers himself

is greater than one who takes a city. It is sometimes necessary for a woman to be sure." She had turned, was going down the path almost before he realized it; "No—I don't want you to come with me," she called back. By the time he had torn open the gate she was gone, a shadow among the other moving shadows.

Shackleford flung himself on the bench, grinding the stem of his pipe between his teeth. Had there been even the smallest trace of irony in her voice he would have hated her, and himself, utterly. As it was, it seemed to him that many of the questions he had been asking himself had been unexpectedly and very completely answered.

Chapter II: Truths behind Figleaves

JUST over the crest of a wave Shackleford saw a white beard sticking up above the froth of the ocean.

"Good morning, Father Neptune," he called. "I thought I recognized those distinguished whiskers."

Dr. Mitchell allowed his feet to settle, thus bringing himself from a floating position into one which permitted him to tread water. He blew the spray from his nostrils with lusty snorts, shaking his massive, dome-like head.

"Hello, my boy!" he exclaimed, thrusting out a large hairy hand. "When did you come down?"

"In May."

"Why haven't I seen you?"

"I've been working on a new book."

"And trying, I'm told, to live up to your reputation."

"It's pleasant to think I have one. But why just the sort I assume you mean?"

"Women will talk, you know."

"Favorably, I suppose. Even when you disappoint them."

"Of course. Can you imagine a woman admitting any such disappointment?"

"Your cynicism delights me, doctor. Well, if that is the sort of reputation anyone wants, I suppose it makes very little difference how he gets it."

"It should make a great deal of difference, I say." The doctor's eyes sparkled. "Having the name, one usually enjoys a bit of the game, don't you think?"

"Naturally. But one should never admit having played it. At least not in specific instances. But I assure you, whether you believe me or not, that during the entire three months I have been at Easthaven, my life has been an open book."

"No doubt. Most open books are written in characters nobody can read—or they wouldn't be open. As a physician—" His remarks were interrupted by an onrushing breaker. They

emerged from its smother of foam, sat on the beach. Shackleford was troubled.

"Tell me, doctor," he said, "who has been talking?"

"No one—unkindly. Our charming friend Mrs. Duane, whom it seems you have met, rather gave me the impression at bridge the other afternoon that you were a very dangerous fellow. She spoke of you, I may say, in terms of the utmost enthusiasm."

Shackleford felt relieved. There had been no reason for talk, so far as he was concerned, and yet he had feared it. There was Mrs. Darrow, for instance. Some unkindly eye might have observed her visit to the lodge that night—have misinterpreted it. There had been nothing else to observe. She had gone to visit her brother, near Boston; it was now August and he had not seen her since that evening.

"What's your new book about?" Dr. Mitchell asked, his voice booming.

"Certain historical aspects of the sex question."

"H—m! We need a little more frankness on that subject." He regarded Shackleford with a

genial smile, nodding his massive head sagely. Seeing that he was about to go on, Shackleford remained silent. Most persons were silent when this dominant character elected to speak; the students at the famous medical school over which he presided feared him, loved him, and called him "Whiskers" behind his back.

"It's fine to see these youngsters playing about so unashamed," he said, gazing at a bronzed and almost nude group of bathers running up the beach. "It's so honest, clean. None of your nasty, hole-in-the-corner ideas about sex. The sort that damned *my* generation. We're progressing. In time we may even come to recognize the fact that man's ability to reproduce—to create—is his one god-like attribute, and not a curse wished on him by some mythological devil."

"I'm afraid," said Shackleford, "that our friends the theologians like their charming devil. In fact, they couldn't very well get on without him."

"I know. They've got to stick to their notions about original sin. If the first man hadn't offended their illogical deity by doing the very thing he was put on earth to do, their whole

scheme of redemption would go to pot. Amusing, in a way, when you remember that God's first command to man was to increase and multiply. It's a pity, I think, that such wrong ideas about sex were ever put into people's heads. I can't find any authority for them in the New Testament. I've tried all my life to live in accordance with the teachings of Christ, because I believe in them, but I object to the notion that the relations between men and women are an evidence of their sinful natures—something naturally low, and bestial and unclean. When I was a young man it was thought that sex emotions, even in marriage, were something a decent woman should feel ashamed of. Thank God we've gotten away from that. Some day we'll get away from marriage itself—at least as it is today. Women are responsible for monogamy. After all, it's nothing but a manifestation of warped maternal instinct."

Shackleford allowed a handful of sand to trickle through his fingers.

"Just how do you make that out?" he asked.

"It's quite simple. In prehistoric times the head of the tribe, the Old Man, had the most wives. The young women naturally preferred him

to the village cripple. What was the result? The strongest, ablest man had the most children. Natural eugenics, of course. Breeding from the best stock. Polygamy was a very important factor in the evolution of the race, my boy, although most people don't realize it. The wives all shared and shared alike. No thought of jealousy—no reason for it. Until property came in. That made a difference. Wife number twelve, perhaps, got to thinking that when the Old Man died, his flocks and furs and fish-hooks, instead of belonging to *her* children exclusively, would be shared with the children of all the other wives. She didn't like that. It outraged her maternal instinct, so she went to work to cut the number of official wives down. Concubines didn't matter—their children couldn't inherit. She finally, with the assistance of the church got the number of wives, in Christian countries, reduced to one. The concubines didn't worry her greatly—the mistress has long been a recognized institution in Continental countries. Her children's property rights were protected—those born out of wedlock were spawn of the devil, lost souls, who couldn't inherit. You'll find the situation recognized even

today in our common law. Take a mistress, and the courts won't stop you—take a second wife and you'll go to jail for bigamy. That's for the child's sake, of course. Right, from a property standpoint although the world is beginning to take a little more human attitude toward the illegitimates. The joke of the whole matter—the cream of the jest, you might say, is that in thousands of cases the modern woman, having secured the legal right to one man's person and property for the sake of her children promptly refuses to have any, and uses her legal club, not for the benefit of her theoretical offspring, but for the benefit of *herself!* Not against possible children of another woman, but against her own! Rich, don't you think!" He smiled merrily.

"I do," Shackleford agreed. "Alimony as a paying institution, you might say. Although why a man should be expected to keep on paying indefinitely for favors which one might assume had been mutually enjoyed is beyond me."

"We'll do away with it, before long. Except where support of the child is concerned. But it will require frankness, about sex matters. Education. Knowledge. A lot of knowledge. And un-

derstanding. Love is a very charming and sentimental idea, but my experience is that it doesn't amount to much, without a physical basis. And it is precisely because we refuse to recognize that basis, that so many marriages go wrong. You said something a moment ago about favors being mutually enjoyed. Suppose they aren't. Suppose this blessed and holy ignorance we've been setting such store by, turns out to be only a menace. There are emotional experiences in married life which must be lived together or they are not lived at all, at least so far as the woman is concerned. I've had patients, women who had been married for years and not known them—nervous wrecks for no other reason than the selfishness, or ignorance, of their husbands. Or both. There is a mutuality in such matters that can't be ignored, you know—even in a kiss. You've no idea how many marriages are wrecked by that sort of sex-selfishness."

"I should think," Shackleford said, "that the companionate marriage idea might help."

"Perhaps. But at best it's only—experimenting. The trouble lies deeper. Such things should be understood—taught. There are more ways of

being a successful husband, my boy, than by paying the monthly bills, although a great many men don't seem to realize it. My experience is that if a woman finds happiness in one man's arms she isn't going to look for it in another's. . . . It's all very well for theologians to prattle about marriages being made in heaven but we doctors are forced to see the physical side of it. To recognize that even the most ethereal love demands physical expression. It's rather a pity we don't teach our youngsters more about such things, instead of turning them loose to pick up their information on street corners. It would make more happy homes than a knowledge of trigonometry."

"I am trying to put something of the sort in my book." Shackleton said. "But it isn't easy to discuss such matters with frankness."

"No. We're hampered by too many conventional figleaves, which the public is told not to look behind. The orientals are wiser. They have learned treatises on all such subjects. I'm told the oriental women haven't much use for occidental men, with their flash-in-the-pan ways of love-making. But then, the eastern peoples never have

cared much for our western hurry. They take most of their enjoyments in a more leisurely manner—practice control of all their emotions. It's a mighty interesting subject."

"It is," Shackleford said. "I've always believed, myself, that lasting happiness in marriage depends very largely upon how well two people are physically mated."

"There's no doubt about it. Some unions of that sort endure a lifetime. And so much depends on the man. I know a case down here—a young and very charming married woman—if she were *my* wife I'd be mad about her—who illustrates my point perfectly. You don't know her, and of course I'll mention no names. Not a patient of mine, naturally—I don't practice. But I happen to know that this woman is wearing herself out with hard physical exercise, horseback riding, walking, swimming—just to kill the natural, God-given passion in her—the thing that makes her the superb creature she is. A perfect mother, gone to waste. Husband away a large part of the time—drinks a good deal when he isn't. You probably remember what Shakespere has to say about the effects of liquor on such things as de-

sire—and performance. You can't cheat nature and not pay for it. I venture to say that woman's sex life is a mixture of torture and disgust. Why she doesn't leave him I can't imagine. Pride, I suppose. Most women would take a lover. She isn't that kind. But if she ever *does* meet a man she cares about—really—look out for fireworks. She's a bundle of flame, inside. Dynamic. But under control. You can see it, just to look at her. I'll venture to say she hates her husband, in her soul, probably without knowing it, for all the things, including children, he has denied her. A martyr, in more ways than one. It's a wonder she doesn't cut his throat! Well—I'm going to have another dip before I go in. Join me?" He got up.

Shackleford was still trickling the warm sand between his fingers.

"No, thanks. I'll lie here for a while and bask in the ultra-violet rays. See you soon." He lay back on the sand with his eyes closed, dreaming. A tinkling voice aroused him; he glanced up to see Sylvia Duane standing beside him, a Dresden figure, in a one-piece suit of flowered silk. She put out her hand.

"Adonis!"

Shackleford did not stir.

"Come and bounce me over a few waves."

"Sorry," he said, "but it's too hot. I'm quite incapable of motion."

"Don't you mean emotion?"

"Perhaps. The two are often synonymous."

She laughed, pretending embarrassment.

"I'm blushing—all over," she said, nestling down in the sand beside him. "Why haven't you been to see me?"

"Busy, my dear." He did not feel in the humor to attempt even a polite gesture. "How is your husband?"

"He's gone to Chicago. Why don't you drop in —tonight? You shouldn't work at your writing —nights. It's bad for the eyes."

Shackleford regarded her lazily.

"Vulcan," he said, "always *did* pay too much attention to his smithing. No doubt you miss him."

"You miss a toothache, if you've had it long enough."

"My dear Venus—that is not at all a nice thing to say."

Her eyes smouldered like coals under a grey film of ash.

"I'm tired of saying nice things. Did you know Ann Darrow was back?"

"I didn't."

"She likes you."

"How do you know?"

"She said she didn't think you good-looking. That's always a sign. Harvey says the reason women make such fools of themselves over writers and people like that is because they're just—children, and therefore given to hero worship."

"Am I to assume that anybody is worshipping me?"

"I shouldn't be surprised. And like most worship, usually indulged in on Sundays. I saw you at church one morning some weeks ago. Did you and Ann have a nice drive?"

"It was very nice indeed, so far as I was concerned. Only much too short. You will have to ask Mrs. Darrow about *her* side of it."

"She wouldn't tell me if I did. Ann never talks."

"Priceless! I take off my hat to her. A woman who never talks is a saint."

Mrs. Duane's eyes narrowed. There was an expression not altogether lovely upon her very lovely face.

"Don't make the mistake, my dear man, of thinking Ann Darrow a saint. Devils, too, have wings."

"That's the second catty thing you've said in five minutes."

"It's not catty. I mean that Ann is human like the rest of us, with a lot of the devil in her, even if she does look like an angel."

"I'm glad to hear it. But why tell *me?*"

"I thought you ought to know."

Shackleford sat up abruptly. He was beginning to feel annoyed.

"Are you trying to imply," he said, "that I am interested in Mrs. Darrow?"

"No. I'm trying to arouse your waning interest in me." She smiled at him shamelessly. "We can't all look like saints, you know, even if it *does* make us more attractive. How's this, for example?" She drew her pert features into a demure and solemn frown.

Shackleford began to laugh.

"Adorable!" he grinned. "No one could resist you!"

"That's nice. Go right ahead and tell me every lie that love can inspire in a man's heart. I'll believe you—when you come to see me."

"You love to play at love, I'm afraid."

"Play? My dear man—I'm in earnest. Don't you know the importance of being in earnest?"

"Likewise the impatience—"

She rose quickly and stood looking down at him. He thought she was angry.

"You're heartless!" she whispered. "I don't believe you capable of *any* sort of feeling." She bent over him, her face close to his, her eyes inviting. "Please come, Adonis. Tonight. I'd like to find that I am wrong. You left me rather —unconvinced—that day at the lodge. I've been wondering about you, ever since."

Shackleford said nothing. He was thinking of the singular difference that may exist between goddesses. Diana—and Venus. Mrs. Duane was still smiling down at him.

"Don't be so—blasé," she whispered. "There may be nothing new under the sun, so far as you are concerned, but you can't tell *what* might hap-

pen, by moonlight!" She danced away, called over her shoulder. "There's a moon tonight, you know. I'll expect you." She ran up the beach, her cheeks brilliant with color.

Shackleford dressed and went back to the lodge, pondering the stratagems of women. So Mrs. Darrow had returned. And because of it, Mrs. Duane was determined to bring him to her house that night. It would please her vanity, to boast of it, tomorrow. As he came from the front hall to his study, he heard voices outside, in the garden. Through the open door he saw Ann supervising a wrestling match between the two McQueen children. She was dressed in white linen, and as she came toward him he thought he noticed a difference in her. She seemed less tense: her eyes met his with a new warmth; the frost which usually veiled them had gone, the mockery. He thought of clear stars. As he put out his hand he realized that for some unaccountable reason he was blushing.

"I'm so glad you're back," he said. "I've missed you—terribly."

"I've missed *you*. How is the poem coming along?"

"It's finished."

"I'm anxious to hear how you ended it."

"The ending, in a way, is also a beginning. Won't you come in? I'd like to tell you about it."

"Not now. I must get the children home in time for dinner."

"When can we talk?"

"Tonight. I'll stop for you at nine. We'll drive." She spoke quickly, surely, as though the matter had been thought over, decided, in advance. Clearly she wanted to see him, talk to him. Mrs. Duane, no doubt, had anticipated that she would. His eyes followed her as she went through the garden, the children running ahead after a black and yellow butterfly. She did not look back, but that, too, seemed characteristic. She was not a woman to look back, ever.

"Edelweiss," he thought, watching the cool white blur of her against the green shadows of the dogwoods.

Chapter 12: Pagans

THE night was close and very hot; the August moon lay upon the horizon like a huge red lantern floating in a sea of sultry haze. Shackleford, sitting on the porch of the lodge, caught glimpses of it through the still black curtain of leaves—an arabesque in flame.

He had come to the porch, that Ann might not be kept waiting; the thought that some passer-by might see her car standing in front of the lodge annoyed him. It was better he felt, to join her at once, so that she need make only the briefest of stops.

Yet as he considered this, planned it, the need for such planning became equally annoying. Secrecy, evasion, intrigue; he hated them the more, because they involved the woman he loved.

He admitted that he loved her, as he sat there behind the screen of clematis; admitted it frankly, without evasion, and because he believed

that the love between them, assuming that she shared his feelings, was a fine and beautiful thing, it was hateful to think that it might ever be degraded, brought down to the level of some cheap *amour*. To plan and dodge and meet in dark corners was possible for the Sylvia Duane type of woman, perhaps, but he did not think it possible for Ann Darrow. Nor for himself. A more serious business, if she really cared for him. She had spoken, one day, of edelweiss; since then he had thought of it many times. A high, rare, flower, to be perilously come by. He was ready to scale any heights, to gather that exquisite blossom, but he was not ready to crawl in subterranean caverns, through ways filled with mud and slime.

Tonight, he felt, would decide their future. He thought she meant to speak of it, although he realized that she could scarcely do so until he had spoken first. He would need to tell her that he loved her—not such an easy thing to do. It would be simple enough to blurt out the fact, like any schoolboy, but such a declaration would mean nothing unless accompanied by some definite proposals concerning their future. Incongruous, in

a way, the thought of proposing to a married woman! What could he propose? Divorce? It was the obvious course. A secret *liaison?* He did not want that. There was no wrong, in loving, even a woman who was married, but if that love was real and lasting, meetings in secret could never satisfy it, could only cheapen and in the end completely stultify it. His thoughts were very practical ones; even the drive they were about to take might prove enough to set the tongue of gossip wagging; he knew enough about that poisonous tongue to realize with what ease and delight it slew its tens of thousands.

She was coming, now: he heard the deep throb of the motor, saw the flash of nickel and black lacquer in the moonlight. He was beside her, in the car, almost at once; he thought, from the quick smile she gave him that she understood and appreciated his tact.

They drove inland, away from the sea, along roads bordered by low stone fences with occasional and sudden cool dark walls of woodland—maple and hickory and oak. Other cars approached them, flashed by in roaring clouds of dust; only then did he realize how rapidly she

was driving. The swift, on-rushing air agreed with his mood. His thoughts, his emotions, were racing, too. He felt that hers were—that a seething, turbulent current of sensations was passing between them, tense, electric. He knew that he must talk, to relieve that tension, and because he did not think that she was ready, even then, to talk about themselves, he spoke of the McQueen children; they at least were something near to her—had been with her, when he had seen her last.

"You are awfully fond of the McQueen boys, aren't you?" he said. The words sounded flat, almost meaningless, against the inward clamor of his thoughts. "I suppose their parents are a very contented couple."

She answered quickly; he realized that she also had found the long silence rather terrifying.

"They are. And because Mary McQueen knows nothing whatever about bringing up children according to the latest rules of hygiene, the boys are both unusually healthy specimens. There isn't any doubt about her being contented. Her husband, her children, fill her life. I think he comes first. They're tremendously fond of

each other. Personally, I mean. And of course she hasn't much time to think about the things she hasn't got—clothes, automobiles—trappings. I know women who would consider their next door neighbor's new car a personal insult. Mrs. McQueen doesn't care about such things. She's satisfied with her man."

"I wish you'd bring the boys in to see me, some day?"

"I shall. They'll amuse you with their questions. The other afternoon Timmy—that's the younger one—seven—wanted to know why, when it rained, the rain didn't put the sun out? I'd told him it was a fiery ball. They're startling, at times. This morning Denny said he felt his father must have been spanked a lot when he was a boy, because he knew so well how to do it. It seems he'd been given a whipping last night, for swearing. I was the innocent cause of it. I took a box of candy with me when I went there yesterday, and, to tease him, asked if he thought he could eat two pieces. He said 'Betcha a dime I can eat the whole damned box!' His father paddled him for it when he came home. McQueen is kind, but firm. And such a gentleman, even

though he *is* only a gardener. I got caught with a flat tire one morning last winter, on my way to church. The road was inches deep in mud. He changed it for me, in his best Sunday clothes, without once taking the name of the Lord in vain. That shows character, don't you think?" She gave Shackleford a quick smile. "His wife adores him. They're the most contented couple I know."

"Isn't contentment just doing without things gracefully," Shackleford said, "because we know we can't have them?" He was wondering if he would ever be able, gracefully or ungracefully, to do without her.

"Not in their case. They *have* what they want. Of course they quarrel now and then. It's good for them, I think. Dennis drinks a bit, at times, but Mary never makes the mistake of interfering with him, while he's doing it. She waits until he's over his spree. Then she shames him by telling him of all the foolish things he's done. She says the easiest way to make a fool of any man is to let him have his own way. ' 'Tis not me will be humoring him' she says 'for thin he will be think-

ing himself better than he is, and not even the blessed Pope could be that.' "

"It's a masculine failing, I'm afraid," Shackleford said grimly. "How did you enjoy your stay in Boston?"

"Who told you I was in Boston?"

"I've forgotten, now. Someone said you had gone there."

"It was the Berkshires. I was visiting my brother. He's a college professor—and a philosopher. Most college professors are, I imagine. Have to be. I wish you knew him. He asked me to come up because he's been having trouble with his wife. She's left him. For a career. I believe she writes plays—or wants to. The only way to appreciate a woman with brains, he says, is never to marry one. Now he thinks they're all fools. Most, at least. It's too bad."

"The notion that women are fools is a mistake no wise man ever makes," Shackleford said. "At least not twice."

"I suppose not." Ann Darrow was preoccupied. "I had some splendid talks with him, while I was away. About life and—things. He has a very clear mind. Some of the ideas he gave me I

adored—but"—her shoulders moved rather despairingly—"when you accept new thoughts—take them into your mind—it's like putting a new piece of furniture in your living room—it makes all the other pieces look so old, and shabby, and out of date."

"I can't imagine any of your thoughts being out of date."

"That's only because you don't know me. I'm rather conventional, in some ways. Sylvia Duane thinks I'm old-fashioned. You've seen her, I suppose."

"This morning. On the beach. She told me you were back."

"I hope you were—nice to her. I try never to say unkind things about people, but Sylvia has at times a capricious tongue."

"I was nice enough. I usually try to be agreeable to people, although I sometimes wonder if it pays for all the lies you have to tell."

"I don't like—lying—, either," Ann said. "But—there are times when even the truth may not be true. Unless you are prepared to make it so." They had come swiftly to the thoughts which raced beneath the surface of their small talk, but

Ann checked them with her next, hurried words. "I'm fond of Sylvia. She's an impulsive soul. Always letting her enthusiasms carry her off the track and then wondering how she's going to get back on again. She's really very fond of her husband, and yet she goes right on, year after year, meeting the only man she ever loved. But there is no doubt that whatever she does, she does with an air. I believe that if she were on the point of committing suicide, she'd stop to powder her nose. Did she say anything about me?"

"Nothing important," he lied. "I believe she remarked that you liked me."

"That isn't important, then?"

"Not when it comes from anyone but you."

"Thanks. But what Sylvia said *was* important, in its way. I wonder if you fell into her little trap?"

"You mean—commit myself by expressing similar sentiments, about you?"

She nodded.

"No. I told her she was—adorable."

"That was—clever."

"Not clever. True. I've quite fallen in love with her."

She turned upon him, her eyes very bright against his.

"I don't like that. It's not—real!"

"Have any of the things we've been saying to each other for the past half hour been real?" he asked harshly. "Haven't they been just a sort of —smoke screen, to hide what we've really been thinking and feeling? Ann—I—"

"Look!" She pointed ahead. The car, now over the crest of a low hill, was racing down toward the beach. The lighthouse on Tanner's Point was the only object which broke the wide sweep of ocean—the high moon silvered the water in countless glittering facets, arranged in the shape of a huge open fan, its periphery, where it touched the shore, tipped with white plumes of foam. Shackleford caught his breath at the sharp beauty of it. Almost at once the car ground to a stop at the roadside and Ann sprang out, went toward the beach. He hurried after her, wondering what she meant to do.

She moved swiftly over the loose sand, still warm from the August sun. Without the breeze made by the moving car the air seemed hot, but as they crossed the sand dunes which bordered

the slope of the beach, a low cool wind swept up from the surface of the ocean, strong enough to rustle the tufts of sparse yellow beach grass. Shackleford turned, was about to speak, but she had walked away from him, her fingers loosening the collar of her blouse.

"I want a swim," she said abruptly. "It's—hot!" She stepped into the shadow of one of the sand dunes, tossed off her shoes, her stockings, her other clothing. He saw her running toward the water, slim and graceful and very lovely, like an ivory figure in the moonlight. She ran swiftly, vivid with life; in that golden, moonlit moment she seemed another, a different woman, impetuous in her physical freedom, exuberant—untamed.

He followed her, as soon as he could strip off his own clothing, but when he reached the first line of breakers she was already beyond the surf, swimming with effortless strokes toward the opposite side of the small, horseshoe-shaped bay. In the semi-darkness it was difficult to distinguish her white body from the white streaks of foam.

The ocean was smooth, flat, the surf from the

ground-swells so gentle that it was not necessary to dive through it. Shackleford swam out, following the wake left by Ann's moving body. Her swift decision to go into the water had surprised, disconcerted him; she meant, apparently, to swim across the bay; the distance he judged to be about an eighth of a mile. An amazing woman, who had just done an amazing thing; it was like her to have done it with the calm dignity of a goddess—he pictured the giggling and suggestive coyness with which George Avery's friends would have enacted a similar scene.

As he swam, his eyes upon the white glitter of foam ahead, it came to him that instead of being amazing, no act on her part could have been more divinely appropriate, more in keeping with all she was, all they both were, all their astonishing surroundings. They might well have been two pagan lovers, enacting the age-old life drama upon some age-old shore. The tall lighthouse on the point, most ancient of all man's symbols, could have stood on the coast of Phoenicia. There would be groups of bronzed worshippers about it, giving thanks to the Author of All Life

for their harvest. He could see the chanting priests, pouring out libations from their shell-shaped cups—the votive offerings of fruit, of wine, of corn, the ring of circling dancers, the chariot drawn by bulls, the sacred ark, containing the egg, emblem of inert nature, which held within it all that is or ever can be; the serpent of wisdom, of knowledge, of divine passion, ruling man's existence through his impulse to create; the rod, exalted symbol of the producer of life, the creator of the universe and all living things therein. Reflections, perhaps, from his reading, from the work upon which he was engaged, yet strangely real. There were race-memories, deep in the minds of men—subconscious memories; they peopled his thoughts with countless shadowy figures—made all that he was thinking, doing, seem not so much a new experience as the reliving of an old and often-dreamed dream. He could almost hear the women of Babylon, wailing the passing of Tammuz, god of the seed-time, the harvest, so soon to shake off his bright garments of summer for the shrivelled rags of autumn, for winter's sombre shroud.

With every sweep of his arm he knew his love for her. He shouted it aloud, through the swift foam. There were no perils too great—no sacrifices. A line from a play he had seen that winter flashed into his brain. "What if they wrecked their lives—think of the stars they steered by!" Mariners, on uncharted seas, watching the ancient stars. He strode through the breakers, dashed their crests aside with his hands. She was ahead of him, running swiftly up the smooth shining beach. He saw her look back . . . there was laughter in her face . . . in her eyes, as he caught her, panting, stumbling in the soft sand . . . the soft warm sand . . . laughter on her lips, as they met his . . . exultant laughter in their hearts . . . not enough laughter in the world—not enough of each other . . . the ecstasy of their embrace shook her, swept her to the utmost rim of life . . . she *was* life—a part of the blazing and incredible mystery of it . . . she sighed . . . again, and yet again, her forehead touched the stars.

"I adore you," she breathed. "Do you—care?"

"With all that I am, or was, or ever can be!" he said, his voice shaking.

She lay still, in his arms, spent with giving. There was no time in the world, no sound, no movement. Only peace . . . and the high, quiet stars.

Book Three

Autumn Rain

Chapter 13: Morals

IT was ten o'clock and Shackleford was just having his breakfast. Mrs. Curlett was annoyed because the hour was so late.

"You did not sleep in your bed last night," she announced, setting down his third cup of coffee.

"Now how did I ever come to overlook such a thing as that?" he smiled. "Is it—essential?"

"I don't think so, sir," Mrs. Curlett ventured.

"But expected, I suppose?"

"I—you generally do, sir."

"Customary, we might say. Still, I am a bachelor. Was your husband a bachelor, Mrs. Curlett?"

"My husband was a decent married man."

"Not when you married him, surely, Mrs. Curlett."

"It was then he was married, sir."

"To be sure. Did he always sleep in his bed?"

"He did, sir."

"And in yours?"

"Of course, sir. Whose else?"

"That is sometimes a question. I'm told that the great and good father of his country slept in many beds, here and there. Although with whom is not always a matter of record. He may even, at times, have slept on the floor. I sometimes sleep on the floor myself, Mrs. Curlett. You'll forgive my peculiar habits, won't you? At least you were spared the trouble of making my bed."

"I'm sure it's nothing to me, sir, where you sleep."

"I'm glad of that. But I really wasn't out last night, Mrs. Curlett. As a matter of fact I got home too late to go out. But it happens, although you may not have suspected it, that I am a god. At times, anyhow. I felt I was, last night. And gods, of course, never sleep, in beds. So, as I had a question of the utmost importance to consider—a question which may even involve the welfare of future generations—I sat in the garden and considered it. I trust you don't mind."

Mrs. Curlett was saved the need of a reply by the sudden ringing of the doorbell. She returned almost at once, her nose in the air.

"Two ladies to see you, sir," she said.

"Two. This is indeed flattering. And who are these optimistic females?"

"Mrs. Duane is one of them, sir. I've never seen the other."

"Show them into my study, please, and say that I will join them as soon as I have finished my coffee."

Sylvia was sitting at the desk when he went in, smoking a cigarette and glancing at his books. Her eyes were very bright and searching.

"Hello, Adonis," she said. "I want you to meet Miss Cushing."

Shackleford shook hands with a small, pale woman, whose figure had been unduly refined.

"Sara simply insisted upon my bringing her over. She's read some of your books. A very intellectual woman, who studies all sorts of deep subjects. You should have a lot in common."

"I've heard some awfully nice things about your last book," Miss Cushing said enthusiastically.

"Really?" Shackleford smiled. He was tired, and not in a humor for conversation.

"So long as people talk about them," Sylvia

laughed, "I suppose it doesn't matter what they say."

"I don't wonder authors are conceited." Miss Cushing crossed her thin legs. "With everyone making a fuss over them. I suppose you're tremendously successful with women."

"I'm still a bachelor, if that proves anything." Shackleford laughed.

"Tell me," Sylvia waved her cigarette, "where you managed to find all these queer books." She flicked some ashes toward one of the open volumes. "They *look* interesting. And frightfully immoral. What's this about mistletoe?" Her finger indicated the heading of a chapter.

"Every Phoenician woman," Shackleford said, "was obliged to sacrifice herself to Mylitta. The Syrian Venus, you know. The goddess of fertility."

"Was it—compulsory?" Miss Cushing asked.

"It was. Once. The laws of their religion required it."

"They don't have to make any laws about it nowadays." Miss Cushing's laughter threatened to overcome her. "But why once? So sort of—narrow-minded, don't you think?"

"On the appointed day," Shackleford went on, "every woman was obliged to go to the temple and sit there beneath a branch of mistletoe, until some man—"

"My God! They're doing it yet!"

"The only difference," observed Shackleford coldly, "is that if a Phoenician woman tried it a second time, except in marriage, they executed her. In those days women were rather more careful about their morals."

"Now," Miss Cushing said, "they're merely—careful. If New York were in Phoenicia, I hesitate to think what would happen to the younger generation. You'd have to say it with flowers."

"Am I to understand?" Shackleford gave the girl a curious smile, "that you consider the virtue of modern women a myth—"

Miss Cushing was still laughing, her pallid cheeks making an unwholesome contrast with the bright scarlet of her mouth.

"A mere rumor, I'd call it. Nobody believes in virtue any more, except husbands. And not all of them." She turned to Sylvia Duane. "You seem to hold on to Harvey very well. I've often wondered how you do it."

"I'm a smart woman," Sylvia laughed. "I let nothing escape me. Not even my husband. I always see that his mind is kept properly occupied. He likes to make money—I like to spend it. I consider that an equitable arrangement. Could you imagine a fairer division of the matrimonial spoils, my dear Adonis?"

"It has its advantages, certainly," he laughed.

"If he forgets anything important, such as my birthday, or our wedding anniversary," Sylvia rattled on, "I refuse to forgive him—until he buys me a new evening gown, or a hat. One should never consider the cost, when trying to make a husband happy?" She burst into sudden, cynical laughter. "He said the other day, that when I died he was going to insure himself a comfortable old age by marrying my dressmaker. What do all these queer signs mean?" She was turning the pages of one of the books. "This one, for example. It looks like a triangle."

"It *is* a triangle," Shackleford said. "The eternal one. As old as life itself, and quite as important. The point, you may observe, is downward."

"Does *that* mean anything?"

"It has a peculiar and very charming significance."

"I'm afraid I don't appreciate its charms."

"No woman could. It points a way to happiness which all men seek, and most find, but none ever possess."

"You're frightfully cryptic. Why not?"

"Because it lies exclusively in woman's domain. Yet kings have been known to abandon their kingdoms in order to enter it, misers to give up their wealth and common men to sacrifice their dearest dreams."

Miss Cushing took a fresh cigarette from her case.

"It seems to me," she said, "that you are talking in circles."

"Only in triangles, so far." Shackleford struck a match for her. "Although the symbol takes many forms. Do you happen to know why fish is commonly eaten on Fridays?"

"I always supposed it was a religious custom."

"Undoubtedly. A very old one. The fish was sacred to Venus. Her day was Friday. It is astonishing how these ancient forms persist."

"I've made quite a study of sex questions,"

Miss Cushing said. "Ellis, you know. And Freud. He's rather *passé*, of course, but I get a tremendous kick out of him." She sank languidly back in her chair.

Shackleford stared at the two women, wishing they would go. Sex questions, as they approached them, did not interest him; he indulged in some unfavorable reflections upon the ideas of morality held by neurotic women of Miss Cushing's type. The sterner, if franker attitude of the temple of Mylitta was more appealing. Miss Cushing might have intellect, but to him she was utterly without physical charm. His thoughts drifted idly. He saw that Sylvia was regarding him with a restless smile.

"I thought you were coming to see me last night," she said.

"I'm sorry I couldn't." He made a show of lighting his pipe.

"Harvey came back, most unexpectedly. With a bottle of real, pre-war rye. He made as much fuss over it as a hen cackling over a new-laid egg. You might have had some."

"Yes," agreed Shackleford. "I might."

"There was a dance at the club," she went on.

"When Harvey got through sampling the rye he felt so badly I had to go by myself. I wish you had been there. I'm afraid my husband is getting too old for dances."

Miss Cushing looked up from her vanity case; she was repainting her lips.

"I think he's quite young for his age," she said.

"Possibly. But not for mine." Sylvia gave Shackleford an oblique look. "He asked me this morning, if I'd seen you while he was away."

"Don't tell me he's becoming jealous," Shackleford said ironically.

"I hope so. It's a waste of time to like a man your husband can't be jealous of." Her searching eyes met his. "Ann Darrow wasn't at the dance, either."

"Did you expect her?" He tried to keep his voice from shaking.

"I asked her. Or rather meant to. When I telephoned her house they said she was out."

"You seem," Shackleford said, "to have had a rather unsatisfactory evening."

"Oh, no. I always manage to have a good time. It's my romantic nature. One never knows what

charming adventure may lie just around the corner. Harvey says I'm incurable, but you can get over anything, unfortunately, if you live long enough." She stared into the mirror of her vanity case. "Still, I keep on looking—for things I probably never expect to find. I'm doing it now." She snapped the case to irritably. "Wrinkles!" With a charming *moué* she gathered up her various belongings. "Come along, Sara. We mustn't keep the famous author from his work. Miss Cushing is staying with me for a few days." She touched his arm. "Adonis, *do* come over and have tea with us some afternoon soon. Some afternoon," she added quickly, "when you can stay longer than you did the last time. I really can't have Harvey thinking you're just a mythological figure—a queer animal—or bird."

"And just why," Shackleford asked, "should he think me anything of the sort?" He saw that she had some quaint and mischievous notion in her small head; he could not imagine what it was.

"Well—you remember I told him you were a god. That first night, you know." She referred to it with a delicate but obvious regret. "And

gods, if I remember correctly, were in the habit of making their earthly appearances in all sorts of queer shapes. Wasn't Jupiter, for instance, rather given to it? To meet his—lady-loves."

"I suppose," Shackleford laughed, still puzzled, "that he felt he owed something to his constituents, and took pleasure in paying his debts."

"He must have. And in his various earthly disguises wasn't he rather partial to animals? And birds?"

"Why, yes. Bulls. And snakes, I believe. And of course there is the case of his *amour* with a certain lady named Leda. Castor and Pollux were the classical results. In that affair he appeared as a swan."

"So he did," Sylvia stood at the open door; Miss Cushing had already preceded her into the garden. "I've been thinking, Adonis darling"—she laid her hand on his arm—"about *you*. As a nature god, my dear, you were delightful. I almost lost my heart to you. It's—dreadful—to see you so suddenly turn into an—ostrich!" She was halfway to the gate before he grasped her meaning and even then he failed to understand it. Of course she had in mind his affair with Ann

Darrow, but how could their few meetings have been observed. There was the time she had driven him from church, of course. And the evening she had spent with him in the garden. And—last night. The mere thought of last night made him tremble. That was all, except the few moments, the day before, when he had come upon her with the McQueen children. All his profound distaste for gossip, especially any gossip which might involve Ann, returned. Could it be possible that already the tongue of scandal had begun its vicious attack? Sylvia Duane had meant to imply that he stood with his head in the sand, believing himself, his acts, to be invisible. He sat on the doorstep for twenty minutes, trying to determine just why she had made such a remark.

A thin voice aroused him. Denny, the older of the two McQueen children, stood in the path, a letter in his hand. Behind him stood his brother, Timmy.

"Mis' Darrow," he said, "told me to give you this." He extended the letter, a large sealed envelope, boldly addressed, in a hand he instantly knew must be Ann's. Ann's handwriting! The sight of it brought a sudden quickening of his

heart-beats. He felt in his pocket, drew out two small coins, gave one to each of the waiting boys. They ran off, squealing noisy thanks, shouting loudly to a third boy who lurked at the lower end of the garden.

Shackleford had a sudden thought.

"Denny!" he called. "Come here!" The boy turned back, a bit crestfallen, a bit truculent, as though he feared that his reward was about to be taken from him. "Who is your friend?" he pointed to the third youngster.

Denny grinned, gave a swift glance over his shoulder.

"Him? That's Spider Duane!" He joined the other boys, now running down the garden path, through the small gate.

Shackleford smiled, not over-pleasantly. One of Sylvia's children. A wiry, light-haired boy, his thin face densely freckled. So Mrs. Duane listened to the gossip of little pitchers—took advantage of their notoriously large ears. No doubt the McQueen boys had heard Ann make the engagement to drive with him the night before—had innocently repeated it. He remembered, now, that she had quoted one of the children as having

asked her if she had "fallen in love" with him. In his intense and passionate adoration of Ann—an adoration which made the word "love" seem weak, inadequate—there was no room for back-stairs gossip, for the carelessly-expressed opinions of children, and yet he realized the harm such gossip might do—not to himself, not to her, but to the infinitely sweet and tender thing which had come into being between them. He had pledged himself that it should never be soiled by any act of his; rather than see others defile it, make it a matter of light talk, he would cry the truth in the streets. He was in no mood for further evasions, for concealments of any sort.

The letter was brief. "Dearest—If you will come to the McQueens' cottage this evening at half-past eight we can walk home together. I am taking the boys some books. You may wish to ask McQueen about your rose bushes. I think they need spraying.—Diana."

If he was an ostrich, he reflected, so was Ann. He smiled joyously, and kissed the page on which her hand had rested.

Chapter 14: Diana Breaks Her Bow

THE walk from the lodge to the tenant's cottage occupied by McQueen and his family lay across the full breadth of the Bartlett place, a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile. Shackleford followed the driveway around the vast shuttered house; its lawns, its shrubbery, its sunken gardens were in immaculate order, although their owner would not return to enjoy them until Thanksgiving. It must be pleasant, he reflected, to possess unlimited money; he had not given the matter much thought, heretofore; now the whole aspect of life had changed. If he married Ann Darrow—and it was his firm hope and intention to do so—he would wish to give her all the things—trappings, she had once called them—which men delighted to give the women they loved. And it came to him swiftly, rather unpleasantly, that Ann's husband, like Mr. Bartlett, was a man of large means, that

she enjoyed all the luxuries which wealth could provide, and that, to marry him, she would be obliged to give them up. She had not said that she intended to give them up; their hours together the night before had been too joyously complete in themselves to allow room for any such discussions—yet the subject would need to be discussed, and settled, between them, before some smirching breath of scandal made it useless to discuss it at all. He thought with sudden fierceness of his utter humiliation, should she be forced from her present position unexpectedly, perhaps even regretfully, through any ill-advised word or deed of his. The possibility distressed him, brought him to McQueen's door in an irritable mood. Yet subconsciously, through every step of the way his heart had lifted to the sound of her voice, had quickened with the memory of her kisses. He had known many women, but none had ever stirred his emotions so profoundly.

She was standing at the side of the low porch, with her foot on one of its steps, talking to Mrs. McQueen. The two boys, he suspected, had been put to bed, and McQueen himself was not in evi-

dence. She straightened up, as he came toward her, and held out her hand. It was cool and firm; his own, he realized, was shaking. From the way in which she greeted him they might have been chance acquaintances; she presented him formally to Mary McQueen and he found himself, confused, touching an imaginary hat. She would tell Dennis, Mrs. McQueen said, in a rich Irish voice, about the aphis, the other bugs which were threatening the roses; her husband had been obliged to take care of one of the farm hands, suddenly ill as a result of drinking too much apple brandy. Shackleford could see only the large bulk of her in the gloom: he thought, from a note of resignation in her voice, that she feared the farm hand's illness might prove contagious.

There was no reason to stay longer. He asked Mrs. Darrow, as formally as she had greeted him, if he might take her home. She expressed a mild pleasure. What consummate actresses women were, even the most sincere of them, when occasion demanded it; the fact that she thought occasion *did* demand it suggested a realization on her part, too, of the dangers which surrounded them. And because of his irritation, he began to

wonder if the dangers she sensed might include the possibility of losing all her present material possessions—possessions which she certainly knew he could not hope to replace.

They went up the road as far as the huddled garage and outbuildings, and then turned to the wide sweep of lawn. They were out of sight of the McQueens' porch now, submerged in the gloom. Shackleford stopped. She was in his arms so instantly, so completely that he realized, as their lips met, how superb her acting, her self-control had been—how tensely she must have waited, as he had waited, for this moment. They swayed together blindly, their feet, stumbling, slipping in the wet grass threatening to betray them. Then Ann tore herself away.

"I must talk to you," she gasped. "We must go somewhere, and talk. Quietly. I've died, waiting to see you. Hours and hours. I couldn't sleep." He did not tell her of his own white night in the garden. "I didn't want to sleep. I wanted my thoughts. I wanted you." It was dark, so dark that they could scarcely see the black bulk of the house, crouched among its evergreens, its huge trees. The air had grown heavy, warmer, there

were flashes of lightning along the horizon, dim rumblings of thunder, presaging a storm. They found a marble bench overlooking the swimming pool, sat there for a time in a close embrace, contemptuous of any storms except the one which shook them both so deeply.

"We must talk," Ann whispered. "There isn't much time. There seems never enough time, for us." She kissed him again, fiercely, avidly, trembling in his arms. "So many things to say. So much." Her close sweetness intoxicated him: he kissed her interminably, unable to find enough of her, of the joy of her: his senses were drunk with her, they were drunk with each other. For many minutes. Interminably! At last she was able to speak again.

"My husband is coming home," she said. "Next week. On the *Berengaria*." The words brought them both a sudden, cool sanity.

"So soon?" To Shackleford the thought of his coming at all seemed incredible; Ann's husband still remained a purely imaginary figure.

"I've just heard from him. By wireless. This afternoon. He's already sailed. I wasn't surprised. He's like that. Never lets me know. I shall tell

him everything, of course. About us. As soon as I see him."

"You—know what it means." Shackleford said, troubled.

"Of course. But what do *you* mean?" He felt the quick, sharp surprise in her voice, the vague distress.

"I mean," he went on slowly, determinedly, "that in giving up your husband you will have to give up a great many things I cannot afford—"

"Oh!" She stopped him with a quick, passionate cry. "Don't! How could I care about—such things, now? Do you think I could? Don't you know?"

He saw that he had hurt her—hurt her pride in the quality, the bigness of her love for him.

"I know," he said. "About you. But how can I help wishing that I might—"

"Hush!" She put her hand over his mouth, trembled as he kissed the palm of it. "We've passed all that. Long ago. I went to my brother's, to think those questions out. All questions, concerning you—and me. I stayed away for a month.

Thinking. When I came back I had my answer. I gave it to you last night. Myself."

"Oh!" He kissed her then, quietly, almost timidly. "I can't help being worried—about you —your sacrifice. When a man loves a woman very deeply he wants to give—"

"Don't. We've given each other. Nothing else matters. Whatever we have, and are, goes with it. For better or worse." She laughed softly. "That sounds like the wedding service, doesn't it? I don't belong to my husband any longer. I never can belong to him, in that way, again. So I must ask him for my freedom. You see that? I must be fair, even to him."

"Yes." He saw that—saw everything, then, revealed. The amazing truth and clarity of her mind—her nobility of spirit—the bigness of her. All his little doubts shrivelled, drifted away. He, too, had been viewing divinity through the wrong end of the telescope; the thought of it made him vaguely ashamed.

She was speaking now, very clearly, distinctly, her head against his shoulder. "I shall ask him to give me a divorce. At once. However quickly it is done, it will not be quick enough. I can't

help thinking of all the years I've wasted. Lost. Years of futility. Of unhappiness. When I might have been so happy. So rightly happy. But if I had not waited, I shouldn't have found—you. I don't want to wait any longer."

He watched her, silent. It amazed him, as she went on, to hear her speak so freely; she had always maintained such a proud reticence about her personal affairs. Now the words flowed, almost tumbled from her lips, as though she felt the need of confession, of ridding her consciousness of thoughts which tortured her, and which she must express to someone, if she was to have relief. He knew that she would never have expressed them to anyone, except himself.

"I wonder if you understand," she went on. "If you know why I am so sure. My month near Boston was a test. Of myself. I had already tested you. That night—in your garden. You did not touch me. I wanted you to, but I think I should have hated you, if you had. Of course you don't know what a dreadful thing my life has been. You couldn't. A man couldn't. The disappointment of it. The stupid and degrading futility. The mental and physical anguish—the final—

contempt. I did not love my husband when we were married. I thought I did, but young women, girls, know very little about love. Real love. I liked him. I liked to be with him. And I had the natural physical longings of any young girl who thinks herself in love. I looked forward to my honeymoon—just as any woman who is married looks forward to it. I knew what it meant, in a general way. There was more than a mental side to life—I knew that—expected it. Wanted it, subconsciously. Any woman who doesn't should never be married. I knew—had heard—of moments of happiness—delirious moments in my husband's arms. All girls think of such moments, even if they don't talk about them. I expected them—not in any overwrought way, but simply, naturally, as part of the mystery and glamor of marriage.

"I was surprised not to find such moments, but not greatly distressed. Everything was new, different, strange. My husband drank a good deal. He always has, not—viciously, but steadily. He seemed to be very happy. If there was anything that our life together lacked, it did not trouble him. I felt that I must give. I did not

know what. Happiness. Something. Give gladly —eagerly. Everything I had, to please him. I did not understand about such things. Only what I felt. To give myself, my soul, perhaps, to please him. Certainly my body. He had that. Took it. Or imagined he did. But never really. Perhaps he didn't know. Certainly he didn't care. A man of sudden, fierce appetites. In all things —eating—drinking—you should see him empty a glass. Gulp it down. So quick. Gone. Like so much water. He's the same with everything in life. Greedy, Selfish. No thought except of his own pleasure—his own enjoyment. Nothing else matters, with him. A dinner, a bottle of wine— a woman to please, satisfy him. No thought that the woman herself might wish to be pleased. No thought of her desires, needs. Increasing needs, very often, as time goes on, when they are not lost entirely in a maze of weariness and disgust.

"I've always felt a pride in myself—in my body as well as in my mind. I think our bodies are beautiful and god-like things. I've tried to satisfy the needs of mine by living simply—by driving hard—wearing myself down with continual exercise. I thought I had killed the need for love

in me—but I was wrong. I knew that—feared it perhaps, when we met.

"Do you remember how ill-natured I was that first day? I knew—and I was afraid. Not of myself. Of you. I thought you were one of these contemptible men who go through life making imitation love to every woman they meet—taking what they can get—regarding each one as a new and amusing experience—laughing at them. I thought you were trying that, with Sylvia Duane. I thought you would try it with me. You didn't. I waited for you to say something, do something, false. Something—cheap. You never did. And now I know it was because you love me, and I am happier than I ever expected to be in life."

She held up her face, and Shackleford caught her to him. "I love you," she whispered. "I adore you."

The storm came upon them so quickly that by the time they had reached the lawn it was whipping at them with swift sharp lashes, huge warm spattering rain-drops, fierce hot little gusts of wind which suddenly became a tremendous, whirling roar of dust, of torn leaves stripped

from swaying branches, of twigs and bits of straw and furious rain. They ran against it, toward the lodge, blinded, drenched, laughing. The slim Lombardy poplars along the driveway bent like courtiers, their foreheads touching the ground; the silver maples, the beeches became suddenly white, as the wind stripped them, turning the under sides of their small pale leaves to the sky; the roar of the storm almost drowned the thunder; the lightning cut the low clouds in dazzling, tortured patterns. Shackleford, his arm about Ann's shoulders, swept her through the small gate, across the garden, and finally, drenched and panting, into his study. She sat on the arm of a chair, laughing, wiping the water from her eyes, her bright cheeks, watching the drip of it from the limp hem of her skirt into her soaking shoes. Outside the rain drummed on the porch roof in a furious dull roar, interspersed now and then with the sharper, keener rattle of hail. He took Ann's arm, drew her to her feet.

"Go up," he commanded, "and take off your clothes. You might have pneumonia." He did not wait for an answer and she attempted none:

he led her up the stairs to his room, tossed a dressing gown over the foot of the bed, took some articles of clothing from a closet. "The bathroom is in the hall," he said. "Bring your wet things down with you and I'll dry them in the kitchen. There's always a fire at night, to keep the bathroom water hot." He went to the kitchen and opened the draughts in the range, then put on the golf suit he had brought down with him. He was hanging his wet coat and trousers on some iron hooks when Ann came in. She had wrapped his dressing gown tightly about her slim body, her bare feet were lost in a pair of absurdly large slippers.

He took the wet mass of clothing from her, draped the pieces one by one over chair backs, the edges of a table. There were not many of them, he observed, smiling. The room was close and very hot; he opened a window beneath the protecting roof of the porch to provide fresh air.

"I don't usually receive my guests in the kitchen," he said gaily. "Suppose we try the living room, while these things are getting dry." He led the way, down a short hall; the living room

would be dark, he reflected, and even in a storm there might be persons abroad with curious, prying eyes.

They sat on an old-fashioned, high-backed sofa, silent, for the most part, except for some murmured expressions of their love. He was thinking of the women in the temple of Mylitta. How easy, how humanly easy, to forget the world outside those streaming windows, and take the quick joy of the moment. He fought this driving impulse coldly, determinedly. The sacrifice in the pagan temple was made but once—might not be repeated under pain of death, except in marriage. He did not know what pain it might bring to him, to treat this woman he loved any less reverently; he did not intend to know. He swept back her dark hair with tender fingers, smoothed her wide forehead, kissed her eyes, her cheeks beneath them, her soft, sweet open mouth, her wet lips, quick-moving lips, like living things, so sweetly, so searchingly caressing, breathed in the sweet breath of her. Vague doubts assailed him, made him momentarily savage. Suppose her husband should refuse to give her up. The mere thought of it made him strain her to his breast as though

to hold her so, eternally, against the world. Hungering for her, he adored her—reverently.

She rose at last, struggled to her feet. Her things would be dry by now—she must go. Shackleford looked into her eyes, wondering just what *her* thoughts had been. His own had been tumultuous enough. She smiled, but he saw that she was not gay.

"I know what has been troubling you," she said. "I am utterly and always yours. You once called me Diana, the huntress. If I ever *did* hunt, I have broken my bow, because I know now that I have found a man who is not only brave enough to win love, but strong enough—and wise enough to understand how to keep it. Oh—my dear—my dear—my Adonis—I *do* love you so." As he kissed her, he felt her cheek wet against his.

Three times, after she had made herself ready to go, they opened the door, only to close it again for one last, straining embrace. To them both it seemed inevitable that a long time must pass, before they would meet again. They might never meet again—as they had met, and were parting, tonight. The future was dark, uncertain.

He took her home at last, through a light, clearing drizzle, left her at her door. He sat through the night, smoking, unable to sleep—unable, almost, to realize that she had gone, so strong was the spell of her upon him.

Chapter 15: Little Pitchers

THE McQueen youngsters, Denny and Timmy, had chased a squirrel into the lodge garden; it had gone through a hole in one of the latticed windows in the foundation wall beneath the study. Shackleford, coming out to ascertain the cause of the disturbance, found Timmy on his stomach poking a long stick through the opening, while Denny stood by, a sling-shot in his hands.

"Hello, boys!" he said. "What's the game?"

"Squirrel!" Denny answered solemnly, not turning his head.

"But"—Shackleford sat down on the doorstep —"the season for squirrels hasn't opened yet."

"Me father says," Timmy announced in muffled tones from the ground, "that they're cuttin' off all the young pears, jes' to eat the seeds of 'em. He says the damn beasts are a pest."

"Really? Well, in any case you'll never get him to come out by poking at him. Take my advice and sit down quietly where you can watch the hole. Then when he appears—bing!—you've got him! Maybe." He inspected Denny's rubber and wooden-pronged sling. "Do you think you could kill a squirrel with that?"

"Sure I could." Denny was very superior indeed. "I killed a cat, onct. First shot, too. I got a good eye." He took careful aim. "Watch that waterin' can." A loud clang showed that the pebble had reached its mark. "When I'm big I'm goin' to git me a rifle, like Mis' Darrow's husband's got, an' go after elephunts, an' taggers, an'—an' lions."

"Have you seen Mrs. Darrow?" Shackleford asked.

"Not since Friday. Her husband's coming back tomorrow. Ain't you seen her, neither?"

"No."

"She thinks an awful lot of you," Denny announced, grinning.

"Why do you say that, Denny?" Shackleford frowned. "You shouldn't make such statements about Mrs. Darrow. They might do her harm."

"Spider Duane says his mother told him ef he didn't keep his mouth shet she'd take the hide offen him."

"And what had Spider been saying?"

"He told her you an' Mis' Darrow got caught in the rain, Tuesday, an' had to come here so you could git yourselves dried out."

"And how did Spider know that?" Shackleford did his best to appear calm, but within he was raging.

Denny began to speak, then paused, his head hanging a bit, his eyes wary.

"Go ahead, Denny."

"Me mother was sayin', at breakfast the other morning," the boy mumbled, "that you two was walkin' home, when the storm came up, an' she was afraid you'd git wet."

Shackleford considered.

"And you told Spider that, did you?"

"Uh-uh." Denny wiggled his bare toes in the dirt. "I didn't see no harm—"

"But," Shackleford went on, "your mother couldn't know, of course, that anybody *did* get wet. Or came here to dry out. Where did Spider

hear the rest of his story? Or did he make it up?"

Again the boy showed embarrassment. His ears were growing red.

"Me father," he whispered, "was over here yestiddy afternoon whilst you was takin' a walk. An'—an' Mis' Curlett was sayin' somebody had left her kitchen all messed up, an'—an'—"

"Go on!" Shackleford commanded; the boy seemed ready to cry.

"She—she told me father she—she found some—hairpins and things—an'—an' a—a lipstick!" There were tears in Denny's eyes, he shook his head in shame of them, under Timmy's astonished glances.

"You boys are very fond of Mrs. Darrow, aren't you?" Shackleford asked. "From what I hear you should be."

"Sure we are," the two chimed sturdily. "She's—aces." Denny added, in complete settlement of any further argument.

"Then of course you wouldn't want to hurt her, by talking about her, would you?"

Denny seemed puzzled.

"Course not. Why would we? Is it any harm to say she come here and got herself dried, ef she was wet? Why wouldn't she?"

Instantly Shackleford realized that the boys had the better of the argument. It was not their clean, direct little minds that were at fault.

"What did your father say, when Mrs. Curlett told him that?" he asked. "I assume you were here with him, and overheard the conversation."

"Yes." Denny nodded. "He took me an' Timmy to the village to git our hair cut. An' he stopped comin' back to bring you a letter. An' Mis' Curlett come to the door and said what I jest told you. An' me father says, 'Mis' Curlett, you'd a damned sight better be mindin' your own business, instead of puttin' bad notions into the heads of innocent children. Little pitchers,' he says, and come back to the car where we was, cursin'."

"And did Mrs. Curlett say anything?"

"She says she was an honest woman an' not no white—whited sepple cur like some she could name. An' then me father started up the car, an' she went in the house an' banged the door."

Shackleford placed his hand gravely on Denny's shoulder.

"Don't talk about Mrs. Darrow any more, Denny," he said. "Either of you." His glance included Timmy. "She wouldn't like it at all, if she knew. It would hurt her feelings terribly. And gentlemen, you know, never gossip about ladies." He knocked the ashes from his pipe against the stone doorstep. " 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings,' " he murmured. "That's Holy Writ, youngsters, the fountain of wisdom."

"Gee, you know a lot, don't you?" Timmy remarked admiringly. "Mis' Darrow says you're awful smart. Wisht *I* knew as much as you do."

Denny regarded his brother gravely.

"That's all right, Timmy," he consoled. "There's plenty of kids don't know no more'n *you* do." He turned to Shackleford, his eyes very bright. "You won't ketch me doin' no more talkin', sir"—again he addressed Timmy—"an' you, neither, you shrimp, or I'll knock your damn head off! You gotta be a gentleman."

"You shouldn't swear like that, Denny," Shackleford admonished. "I'm sure your mother wouldn't want to hear you swear."

Denny grinned.

"I heard *her*, onct, when she got out of bed one night to let me father in. She hit her foot on the point of a rockin' chair, but I guess that'd make most anybody swear. Come on, you!" He spoke to Timmy commandingly. "We gotta git back in time for dinner or Mom'll give us both hell!"

They ran helter-skelter through the garden gate.

Shackleford considered the advisability of speaking to Mrs. Curlett but decided against it. The French had an adage which pointed out how swiftly self-accusing are those who try to excuse. Lipsticks, hairpins, were not evidence—at least not evidence of the presence of any particular female. For once, at least, he could contemplate his reputation as a Don Juan with satisfaction.

Chapter 16: Ostriches

FOR days Shackleford had been unable to concentrate his thoughts upon his work. It had been raining intermittently for over two weeks—dull, sobbing September rain which seemed bent upon reducing the whole outside world to a state of sodden grey gloom. Mr. Darrow had returned home ill, with some unusual tropical disease—not dangerous, Shackleford was informed, but terribly racking, and Ann had been given no opportunity to speak of such things as divorce. After all, a woman cannot well inform her husband that she is about to leave him, while he is stretched helpless upon his back in a sick-bed.

Even she seemed to have been swallowed up by the universal mists; he heard nothing from her. The telephone was silent, but he knew why she hesitated to use it. He had told her, the night of the storm, of Sylvia Duane's remark about

ostriches; in this small town both telephone operators and listening servants might be expected to talk. The McQueen children were suddenly occupied by the tasks of their newly-opened school, and he and Ann had decided that it would be wiser for her not to come herself to the lodge. The problem they had to solve was already sufficiently difficult; to complicate it still further, at this juncture would be an act of folly. Shackleford went through the dull weeks in a mood of sacrifice, of spiritual prayer and fasting, but they reduced his nerves to shreds. It was in desperation that he finally went to call on Sylvia Duane.

He found her curled up on a divan in her library, fastidiously nibbling at *marron glacés*, and reading a brightly-covered novel. She dropped it on the floor when he came in, and glanced invitingly at the other end of the couch. He sat down. There was a smouldering fire of driftwood; the room was pleasantly warm.

"Won't you have a cocktail, Adonis?" Sylvia asked. "You look as though you needed one."

He shook his head.

"Ostriches never drink cocktails," he said gloomily. "It's bad for their digestions."

"And yet," Sylvia laughed, "I seem to have heard somewhere that ostriches are noted for the excellence of their digestions, and can, on occasion, digest even such indigestible morsels as—husbands."

Shackleford rose, suddenly angry, but she seized his hand, pulled him back to the couch.

"If you change, right here before my very eyes," she said, "from an ostrich to a goose, I shall give you up as hopeless."

He was forced to laugh at that, but her remark still rankled; it was like a barbed arrow, which he could not attempt to remove, without tearing the flesh—without tearing his heart. It was impossible to discuss Ann, to speak of his love for her, now, much as he desired to do so. But Sylvia was not bound by any such sentimental chains.

"You've been in love with Ann Darrow for weeks," she announced. "I find a certain satisfaction in the fact. At least it explains your lack of interest in me."

"My interest in you," Shackleford said, "has never changed. You are one of the most delightfully clever women I know."

"Mental, I suppose," Sylvia replied, with a

trace of mockery. "No woman cares to be a purely mental interest, my dear Adonis. To stimulate a man to kiss you is much more satisfying than to spur him on to write books. However, you need waste no sympathy on me. I have just acquired a new outside interest."

"It is better for a woman," Shackleford laughed, "to keep her interests—outside. It avoids unnecessary and sometimes embarrassing complications."

"This one," Sylvia said, "is a tall and handsome blond. I have never been in love with a blond man before. I, too, may find a certain stimulation—" She turned on him suddenly. "I suppose you look on me as just a silly flirt."

"I'd never think of saying so, my dear Venus, but should anyone else make the observation, I am by no means certain I should contradict it."

She laughed, lightly, indifferently.

"We can't all be so serious—and deep. I was born to be beautiful, instead of intellectual, you know, even if my present charms *are* of a somewhat modern and post-war nature. Synthetic." She inspected her smiling countenance in a tiny mirror, added a dash of color to her cheeks.

Shackleford was uneasily silent; he thought that she was striking with dainty, feline claws at Ann. "You haven't kissed me," she continued.

"I wondered if you had noticed it."

"If I were a man, and met a girl like myself, I'd have done it long ago."

"Married ladies can't afford to kiss—ostriches."

"I love things I can't afford—"

Shackleford bent over and pressed his lips lightly to hers.

"It's the first time I've kissed a woman in weeks."

"Really! What marvelous self-control! Or was it merely lack of opportunity." Again he frowned.

"One makes opportunity," he said.

"So that's why you came to see me, today."

He hesitated, tried to change the subject.

"What are you reading?" he asked, picking up the fallen book.

She took it from him, tossed it carelessly to the seat of a near-by chair.

"It's called 'The Sacred Flame,' I believe, or something of the sort."

"A good title. What's it about?"

"Women don't care what books are about, so long as they have an exciting love story and a happy ending. I don't want to talk about books. Have you seen Ann?"

"Not for three weeks."

"Her husband isn't going to die, or anything like that. He has relapsing fever, Harvey tells me. Got it in Indo-China, where he's just been. From lice, I believe, or ticks. You have a high temperature, frightful headaches, can't eat or sleep and are out of your head most of the time. While the spells are on you. They go away quite suddenly, and come back again the next week—over and over, if you aren't cured. Ann must be having a rotten experience."

"Have you seen her?"

"Only once. I stopped at the house last Sunday, on my way from church. I thought she looked very badly."

It was agonizing to him, this picture of her, but it was better than none. He had come to Sylvia, hoping to hear something about Ann, and he encouraged her to talk.

"I am sorry—dreadfully sorry," he said.

Sylvia gave him an understanding look, if not a sympathetic one.

"If you two are in earnest," she went on, "you are in for a bad time of it. There's been gossip. I've tried to stop it. The children have talked. And Mrs. Curlett. Dave Darrow isn't in love with Ann, but he's a fighter—a killer, in a sense. Sort of cold—cruel, Harvey says. I think, just because Ann has never given in to him, he'd like to hurt her—torture her. I think he knows there is something he's never gotten from her—something that has eluded him—that he's never been able to quite reach. And of course, being the sort of man he is, it would make him furious, deadly I suppose, to think another man had succeeded when he had failed. Harvey says he boasts that when he's on a hunt, tracking tigers, elephants, such things, he always gets what he goes after, kills them. I've an idea he'd rather kill Ann, than see another man get her."

Shackleford stood up, his fingers clenching. He was an inch over six feet, with a powerful frame.

"I'm not worried about that," he said. "I can take care of myself—and Ann. She's been trying

to consider *him*. She's—fine, you know. Very fine. She wouldn't want to hurt him—humiliate him in any way. But he can't hold her, if she wants to go. As for his being deadly—anything like that—if he laid a finger on her, I'd shake the life out of him—like a—a—!" Suddenly he realized how unwisely far he had gone, how stupidly melodramatic he was becoming. "You'll forgive me for chewing up the scenery, won't you? I—I'm a bit upset." He took one of Sylvia's *marrons*, devoured it, lit a cigarette. She was staring at him, amused, somewhat surprised as well.

"For anyone interested in such delightful things as spring festivals and all that, it seems to me you are stepping out of your part. You were *so* delightful as a nature god that I hate to lose you. But spring is gone—and you've gone, too—Adonis."

"But spring always comes back, my dear—and Adonis, too—if not in person, at least in the hearts of those who love."

Sylvia sat staring at him. Suddenly she got up—put out her hand.

"I'm just a frivolous little fool, I suppose,"

she whispered, "but I think what you have just said is very beautiful, and I believe that what you feel for Ann is very beautiful too, and I shall never again be so foolish as to laugh at it." A lonely large tear trickled down the side of her nose. Very tenderly Shackleford took her in his arms and kissed her.

"I shan't ever forget you, Venus," he said. "You're a dear."

"Willing to give even the devil his due, I suppose," she laughed. "Well—if you don't, he usually takes it—just as I took that kiss. Now that we are parting forever, and I am to be nothing but a sister to you, I suppose I'll have to concentrate on my new outside interest."

She went with him to the door.

"Good-bye, Adonis," she whispered. "Good-bye."

He hurried down the walk, waving his hand to her as she peered rather dismally through the library window, her lips still repeating their farewell message.

"Good-bye, Adonis."

Chapter 17: Whom Man Hath Joined

SHACKLEFORD stared moodily down the rain-swept street, desolate beneath the dripping October skies. Windblown leaves flecked the sidewalks, drifted in soggy masses along the gutters, splotched the stone walls with sickly yellows and browns. The little comedy he had been playing was over. Seed-time had gone. And harvest. There was no pagan gaiety in autumn rains. In the foggy distance he saw the cathedral-like outlines of Morris Kuhns' huge house. A Gothic palace. Vainly he tried to imagine a Gothic Pan.

His mood was sombre, but resolute. Doubts no longer harassed him. With the coming of Ann, of his love for her, certainty had taken their place. Certainty about many things. About love. About life itself. He had changed his mind

about such things, these past months. Or perhaps Ann had changed it for him.

For years he had been inclined to doubt love. A desire, a physical emotion which a man might feel for many women. He no longer believed that. The summer had taught him something else —something different. The summer, and its women. If love meant only a "biological urge" as so many of his smart friends put it, why had he not responded to the young beauty of the girl he had met at George Avery's house—the maturer but more opulent charms of Mrs. Pennington? He had argued, then, that these women lacked mental appeal. Charm. Yet Sylvia Duane possessed both, in addition to her beauty, and she had failed to stir him deeply. And Miss Cushing, undoubtedly a woman of intellect, in spite of her surface flippancy, had been positively distasteful to him. She had no physical appeal, of course, and he still believed that without such appeal there could be no love.

But what was the added, the unknown factor, which made all the difference? What was it that caused him to tremble even at the sound of Ann's name? Love? Then what was love? She

had asked him that, once, and he had evaded a definition by suggesting that physical attraction, too, was made in Heaven. Mere words, of course. But the Maypole symbol had begun to assume, in his mind, a new significance. If its base was firmly fixed in Mother Earth, it still reached toward the stars. Was not love, then, a combination of two forces? Nature went on with patient artifice to the end that life should be eternally reborn, but was there not something more? A spiritual, as well as a physical mating, if souls as well as bodies were to be evolved? Evolution could not be haphazard. If tall men preferred short women, for the benefit of the race, why should there not be spiritual selection, too? An urge toward the production of higher spiritual types, as there was an urge toward the production of higher physical types. Physical desire was an earthly thing, like the roots of a plant, deep in the rich warm soil. The ethereal imaginings of the poets was an air plant, an orchid, with no roots at all, pallid, unwholesome.

Somewhere between the two lay truth. Not the combination of physical and mental, but of

physical and spiritual desire. He did not know just what he meant by the term, but whatever it was, he felt it for Ann. Perhaps it was more a question of character, than of intellect. She was an intelligent woman, but he did not think of her as a brilliant one. Her mind was not a creative mind; she felt no urge to write, to paint, to give any brain-child to the world. But she blazed to create in another way. He realized quite well her longing for children. Perhaps that was what, subconsciously, drew them together. Certainly, without children, there was no point in marriage. Birth control might make it merely an enjoyable experience, but why marry for that? Perhaps the desire for children, a home, was part of man's race-consciousness, too, whether admitted or not. He had no idea of marrying Ann for the sake of having children. She had told him, plainly enough, that day after church, how much deeper her needs lay, while still admitting that children might be a part of them. In the end he had concluded that love—real love—was a subconscious recognition by two individuals of both their physical and spiritual need of each other—their physical and spiritual fitness

for each other—and of their complete and profound satisfaction in each other—a satisfaction which embraced the needs of body, mind and spirit in perfect unity, and made them in truth "one flesh." Something that went far deeper than spring mating. Something that touched what we call the soul.

He knew he felt that way about Ann—knew she felt that way about him. Nothing could change it—nothing could destroy it. There had been no such experience in either of their lives before—there would be no such experience again. There might be other women in the world, beside Ann, who could have brought love to him—other men, beside himself, who could have brought love to her. He admitted that. He cherished no delusions about marriages being made in Heaven. But the essential point was that having once given love to each other, the gift could not be given again. Substitutes, imitations, perhaps, but never that same beautiful thing. Just why this was he did not know. Perhaps as but once a seed may germinate—but once a chemical reaction between two elements take place. A thing not to be repeated. He knew that

Ann might die, that he might even marry again, but what he felt for her he could never feel for any other woman, no matter how long he might live. That was the truth of it—the mysterious and unalterable truth, the imponderable factor, which all the biologists ignored.

He reached the lodge to find McQueen sitting on the porch waiting for him—with a note from Ann. The first word of any sort he had received from her for over a week. Eager, desperately eager as he was to read it, he invited the big Irishman in for a drink.

"Do you think, McQueen," he asked suddenly, "that those whom man hath joined together God can put asunder?"

McQueen regarded his glass of whiskey, puzzled.

"No man can be after joining annybody together, sorr," he rumbled, "only a priest."

"In which case," smiled Shackleford, "if two people are not married by a priest, they aren't really married at all, and God hasn't anything to do with it."

"It is so, sorr, in my faith, although there be plenty have other notions, more's the pity sorr.

But I've always thought, in a manner of speaking, that when two people are joined by love, 'tis God, sorr, who really does it, and the priest only gives them His blessing."

"Really, McQueen, you are quite a free-thinker."

"It's true, sorr, for all that. Manny's the time I've seen them who took the holy bonds, with no more love in their souls than you'd find in a flea's coat pocket, and then all the priests from here to Rome including the Holy Father himself couldn't do annything to ease their troubles."

"So of course, the wisest plan is for two people to be very sure about each other, in every way, before they marry?"

"If they don't, sorr, they'd be showing less sense than I'd use in so small a matter as buying myself a new coat. Thanks be, my girl Mary suits me, and has since the day I married her, and if I ever found a coat to wear so well, sorr, or fit my lazy back so fine, I'd be the lucky man, sorr, and none luckier, this side of the County Kerry. Thanks for the drink, sorr, and may you never be without one. Good night. 'Tis time I was getting along to my supper."

Shackleford read the note, his fingers shaking. "He is much better," it read, "and I hope to be able to speak to him tonight. Wait for me. I may need you. D." Below was written in afterthought. "As though I did not need you always —more and more."

He ate, with an effort, the dinner Mrs. Curlett served him, his slight appetite still further decreased by the woman's disapproving presence. He knew that Sylvia had been right in calling him an ostrich. She had said that there had been gossip about Ann and himself; only Mr. Darrow's continued illness, his confinement to his bed, had prevented him from hearing that gossip.

He sat in the study after dinner, listening to the rain—waiting—he scarcely knew for what. Whether it was man, with his small social rules and customs who had joined Ann Darrow and her husband together, it seemed to him beyond question that Ann and himself had been joined by God. He would always believe that. She needed him, "more and more," she had written. He knew well enough his need of *her*. And was not the real, the deep need of two persons

for each other, when they loved, a reason for their being together—a reason which derived its strength from older and more fundamental sources than any of the social conventions of man? He felt that must be true—once the depth and reality and truth of that need was established; in many cases, he knew it was not a real need, but only an imagined, a passing one.

"Whom Man Hath Joined Together." The phrase ran through his thoughts interminably.

Chapter 18: When Even Gods Laugh

SHE swept through the hall and into the study of the lodge swiftly, impetuously, and Shackleford knew when he kissed her that she was not in a mood for kisses. She seemed very nervous, unstrung; little spasms of hysterical laughter shook her; he realized at once that she must have passed through some shocking experience.

In the middle of the room she paused, slim and very straight beneath the old-fashioned chandelier. Its two electric globes lit the raindrops on her hat, the rough surface of her tweed suit so that she shone with innumerable tiny bright points of fire like sparks. He knew, from her flushed cheeks, that she had come quickly through the light rain, her breast rose and fell in short gasps. It was amazing to him, to see her

so excited, disturbed; only her eyes were calm. He found comfort in her eyes—at least for herself—they told him that whatever had happened the spirit behind them was still brave and undaunted. She looked at him for a long moment, then laughed again. In some ways, her laugh was not a pleasant one.

"Beasts!" she exclaimed hysterically, throwing herself on the couch.

It was after midnight—well along toward one o'clock, he thought, and he had been waiting for her, for some word from her, since dinner time. He was, in some ways, as overwrought as she was; for almost five hours, love had alternately raised him to Elysian heights, and cast him, helpless, into the depths. It had seemed a wrong and dreadful thing to leave her to face it all, without him; a hundred times he had been on the point of putting on his hat and going to her aid.

He crossed the room, stood stern before the couch, holding her two hands.

"What happened?" he asked fiercely.

"Oh—my dear—my dear!" She pulled him to a place beside her. "I must tell you everything—from the beginning—let me think"—she

rested her forehead for a moment against his arm. "You know he has been dreadfully ill. Burning up with fever—suffering a great deal of pain—unable to sleep. And—delirious. Talking—talking—hours and hours—talking to his beaters—cursing them—going through some imaginary hunt—laughing and talking to the other men with him—Green—Thompson—someone he called Joe. Endless hours of it. Trying to get up—calling for his hunting boots—his guns. Oh—I've had a merry time of it, my dear. Shocking, too, in a way. Cursing—and killing. Endlessly.

"Then he'd grow calm, and just lie there holding his head, suffering. Groaning. Calling for liquor. Demanding it. Cursing us for not giving it to him. Until I thought I'd go mad. I felt sorry for him. You know how one feels—but of course you don't know, because you've never been married. But when you have been, to anyone—for years—you feel—well, you just can't help being sorry, and wanting to do for them, and you search your heart for all the little things you haven't done, in the past, just the way you do when anyone is dead—and you blame your-

self, and feel repentant for not having done them, and maybe you think that if you had it to live over again"—she paused, staring into his eyes —"it wasn't that I loved you any less, my dear, but all those hours—days—made me think of what we call duty. And of course I could not say anything to him about you—about us. That would have been too hard—too cruel. I should have hated myself.

"All this week he's been better. Very much better, so much so that we sent away the trained nurse. With relapsing fever you get nearly well and then you relapse—over and over. That's why they call it what they do. But this time, the doctor said, he thought he was cured—felt sure he was—and so, today, he got up.

"He couldn't go out, of course, so all day he prowled about the house, going over his papers, his photographs—pictures of the places he'd been to, the animals he'd shot, cleaning and oiling his guns. He talked to me, too, about our affairs. Said he was thinking of selling the house here and going abroad to live—asked me if I thought I'd like to live in Europe. There was no sense, he said, in his keeping the place, when

he was away so much of the time. He talked about it all through dinner, and had some champagne brought up, and we drank it, and he seemed quite gay and happy after his long illness. Then we sat in the library, had our coffee there, with some brandy, and he told me of a narrow escape he'd had, killing a wounded tiger. But he'd never been in so tight a place, he said, as he had the time he shot the cow elephant—the she-devil, he always called her, and he called her that then, standing there in front of the fireplace, talking to her—drinking a toast to her. 'Here's to you,' he said, grinning and holding up his glass. 'Old she-devil! Thought you had me that time, didn't you, old girl, but I was too quick for you!' Then he turned to me. 'Remember how you carried on because we had to kill her calf? You always were a sentimentalist. Wasting sympathy on a damned beast. Who'd almost sent me to kingdom come. Didn't waste any sympathy on me, I noticed. Too bad you aren't cut out for big-game hunting my dear. We could have had a lot of fun together. If we sell the place and go abroad I'm going to take the old girl with me. How about it, she-devil? You'd

want me to take you along, wouldn't you?' He stood there, grinning up at the elephant's head, and its little bright glass eyes flashed back at him, and you might have thought she was alive, and was showing her anger and hate of him. Two beasts, in a way, glaring at each other. Hating each other.

"It was then I determined to speak to him about our affairs. It was the chance I had been waiting for. What he'd just said about going abroad to live gave me the opportunity. And then Dr. Andrews came in, and had some coffee and brandy with us, and sat for a few moments, talking. He felt my husband's pulse, and said he'd been up long enough—too long—and ordered him to go to bed. Went up to the room with him, when he objected, to make sure he did. Gave me some medicine for him—tablets—to quiet him—to make him sleep, and said he must take one at once. Then the doctor went away. But in the hall he told me that my husband had made a serious mistake in staying up so long the first day, that he was over-excited, had a nervous, irritable pulse and shouldn't have taken the brandy on top of the champagne. As though I

or anyone else could have stopped him. Dr. Andrews went on to say that he must get to sleep at once—get immediate rest, or he'd probably be down again before morning with another attack of the fever.

"I got some water in a glass, and went in to give my husband the tablet. But he wouldn't take it. He said he wasn't ready to go to sleep, yet, and pulled me down on the bed, kissed me, began to make love to me. I thought, then, of telling him I didn't want his kisses, and because I'd given myself to you, he could never make love—the sort of love he wanted to make—to me again. But I remembered what the doctor had told me, and how worried he seemed, and I knew very well that if I began to talk, then, about leaving him—about a divorce, it would excite him still more, and he'd be up most of the night. So I tried to put him off by telling him what the doctor had said, tried to get him to take the tablet. You see, always before, when he'd come back to me after one of these trips, he would insist on my—remaining with him—he couldn't seem to understand why I wouldn't do it, now. But he finally let me go, and promised to take

the tablet as soon as he'd smoked a cigarette, and I said good night and went to my room and undressed.

"He didn't keep his promise. I was afraid he wouldn't, so instead of getting into bed I sat there in my dressing gown for a while, reading —trying to read—listening. And presently I heard him coming along the hall, and I got up and turned the key in the lock of my bedroom door.

"He tried to open it, and when he couldn't, he knocked, and insisted on coming in. But I wouldn't let him, although he argued, and swore a great deal, and hammered on the door, so loud I thought he'd wake up the servants. So I unlocked it, and told him he must go back to bed at once—that Dr. Andrews had said it was imperative he should get some sleep, and that no matter how long he stood there I was not going to let him come in.

"He stared me straight in the eyes, then, and laughed.

" 'Do you mean that?' he said."

"I told him I did. He knows me well enough to know that when I say things I usually mean

them. So he went away. But presently I heard him in the hall again—he'd gone back to his room and put on his dressing gown and slippers; I could hear the soft, slipping drag of them as he went past my door. Down the front stairs. Into the library, which happens to be directly under my bedroom. I knew what he was after—what he went for. The half-emptied decanter of brandy was on top of the cellaret in the library when we came upstairs.

"It was a difficult situation. I did not know what to do. If I left him, alone, down there, he'd drink—probably keep on drinking most of the night. If I went down to him, he'd insist on his love-making. I knew that. Knew that his going down had been a challenge—I saw it in his eyes, when he stared at me—asked me if I meant what I said. He was determined to break me, you see—break my spirit.

"I knew I couldn't leave him there. And I couldn't let him do what he wanted to do—I'd have died, first. That's the way I feel about—love. So I decided to go down and tell him the truth—tell him I'd found a man I loved—that I belonged to that man and not to him, and that

there would never be any more love-making between us, no matter what he did. I knew that would sober him, at least, and I hoped it would sober him sufficiently to make him take the medicine the doctor had left and go to sleep. He wouldn't, as long as he was thinking about me—what he expected from me. So I went down to the library. But before I went, I dressed.

"When I got to the door—I'd come very quietly—he was standing in front of the fireplace with a rifle in his hands—an elephant gun—the one he'd used when he killed the old she-devil, as he called her. He kept it on a rack below the head, and as I came through the door, he'd just reached for it—was taking it down—I don't know why.

"I began to speak. All I said was his name. David. I said, 'Dave!' It surprised him, of course. My sudden appearance. He whirled about, the heavy gun in his hands. It caught on one of the old she-devil's tusks, and I heard a curious, rasping sound, like silk being torn, and then the whole thing tumbled forward—down—the elephant's head, with the great wooden shield on which it was mounted, and the little

rack below which held the gun. It had been hung, with a chain, from a hook in one of the beams of the library ceiling—large exposed beams—and either the hook, or the iron chain, had rusted through. I thought he was killed of course, when he went down, but he wasn't. One of the tusks had struck him on the head—a glancing blow—and stunned him—knocked him senseless. His head was bleeding. I tried to lift him—drag him to the couch. Roberts, our butler, came in almost at once, and helped me. As soon as we got my husband on the couch I told Roberts to telephone the doctor. I had no idea how badly he might have been hurt.

"He came to, a moment or so after the butler left the room. And the first thing he asked for was brandy. I thought he might as well have it —might even need it, after what had happened. So I went to the library table, where the decanter was, and the glass. He'd been sitting there, drinking. And writing. There was a cablegram, lying beside the decanter. I remembered then it had come two days before, and he'd said it was from his agent in London, about a tiger's head and some other trophies he'd left there to be

mounted. I read the message as I poured out the brandy. It was from a woman. Someone named Josephine. The 'Jo' he'd mentioned in his ravings. She said she was in trouble and that he must come to her at once. He'd been writing an answer to the cable. I read that, too. Her name is Lodge, and he had wired her that he would sail immediately. Called her sweetheart, and told her to buck up. I don't read anyone's letters—papers—usually. I couldn't help reading these. My husband was lying on the couch, still a little dazed, waiting for me to bring him the brandy. He must have noticed the expression on my face as I stood there, the decanter in one hand, the brimming glass in the other, for he staggered up and came to the table beside me—stood looking down, silent, as I was, for a time. Then he spoke. I remember his words exactly.

" 'All right,' he said. 'It's just as well. You'd have found it out sooner or later, anyway. She's my woman. She's going to have a kid by me—unless we can stop it.' Still the killer, the destroyer, you see—always. Then he said he was going to her, and that I could divorce him whenever I got ready. Said he'd be glad to have a real wife to take shooting with him, and not a snivel-

ling sentimentalist. Just then he caught sight of the elephant's head, upside down on the floor, in a litter of splintered wood and chains. 'Well, you old she-devil! You got me at last, didn't you?' he muttered. 'Damn you!' He drank the glass of brandy—gulped it down—and I began to laugh. I couldn't help it. The whole affair seemed so perfect—so complete. That old elephant, hanging there on the wall for years—waiting and planning how to get even with him for the murder of her calf—dreaming of her revenge—planning it—and finally getting it. So long after she was dead. Beasts! Both of them! Oh—my dear—my dear!" She laughed again, hysterically, and in the next moment was weeping, shaking, choking with sobs in his arms.

He kissed her, drew her close and very tenderly to his heart. The autumn rain was pouring again, driving in futile spurts against the windows.

"My love!" she whispered.

"My darling!" His voice broke. "My Diana!" Then he, too, laughed. In spite of her tears, perhaps even in a way because of them, the world seemed suddenly to have become a very Joyous Place.

Postlude

Postlude

AND so it came to pass that on a grey afternoon in November Adonis was driving up from the gates of High Olympus. He whistled as he went, a brave and merry tune, and laughed as he urged on his horses. Winters on Olympus were a time for work; the passage of the Autumnal Equinox had filled him with a vast eagerness to be about his labors.

Venus, who was sitting on the steps of the temple admiring her beauty in a fish-shaped mirror, got up as she heard the sound of hoof-beats and leaned over the edge of the wall.

"Hoo-oo!" she cried, waving her mirror to attract attention. "This is *nice! Aren't you coming in?"*

Adonis pulled up his horses.

"Sorry, my dear," he said with a laugh, "but I can't. I've just gotten back to Olympus, you

know." He glanced up the long, cypress-bordered road. "Today is the first of November."

Venus gave him a very charming smile. The expression on her face betrayed a certain satisfaction.

"I know it is. Haven't I been waiting for you all summer? I'm really very glad to see you back. Did you enjoy your vacation?"

"Tremendously." Adonis perched himself on the edge of his chariot.

Venus gave him a slow, comprehending smile.

"You look a little tired to me," she said. "But then, you usually are, when you get back to Olympus after your summer's labors. I've noticed it year after year. One of the penalties of being a god, I suppose. But don't be downhearted, darling. All the others are just the same way. Even Jupiter usually returns from his little earthly excursions in a dreadfully worn-out condition."

"Don't be absurd!" Adonis exclaimed, his eyes very bright. "I've been writing a book. And I've still got to finish it."

"Of course. Well—any sort of creative work is bound to take a lot out of you."

"I never felt better in my life!" Adonis picked

up the reins. "Or half so happy." He gave a joyous laugh.

"I'm delighted to hear it. When are you coming to see me?"

"I'm not coming."

"What?" Venus began to descend the steps of the temple. Adonis was still laughing.

"I may as well tell you the truth," he said. "I'm not coming—ever. I'm not going to be a god any more—at least not on Olympus. I've found something better. Something that has made me happier than all the gods put together. I'm bigger than any of you—now. I suppose I'll have to spend the winter here because there isn't any way out of it, but when I go back to Earth in the spring I mean to stay there. Permanently."

Venus stared at him in astonishment. He thought her much less attractive than she had seemed in the past.

"My dear boy," she said, "I think you should see a doctor."

"If I remember rightly," Adonis laughed, "I once made a similar suggestion to you—and you declined it."

"But—what has happened to you, to make

you so—different?" She stared at him, perplexed.

"My dear Venus. What has happened to me is something that not even the gods can control, because it is greater than they are. I've fallen in love."

"Ridiculous!"

"Not at all. I'm to be married, in May. And I'm not coming back."

"You'll miss it, on Olympus," Venus said coldly. "You'll miss me."

"Sorry, my dear, but I don't think so. I'd rather have a few years on Earth, with the woman I love, than be a god on Olympus for eternity."

"And what about your springtime amusements? You'll miss them, too, I'm afraid. It isn't always May, on Earth, you know. There is bound to be—November. And there aren't any Maypoles—in November."

Adonis stood very straight in his chariot. There was joy in his smile; the look in his eyes was very tender.

"It is always May, my dear Venus," he said, "in the hearts of those who love, even though

there be no Maypoles—in November. Good-bye!" He whipped up his horses just in time to escape the mirror Venus hurled at him.

A moment later his chariot had disappeared over the crest of the hill, enveloped in a cloud of dust.

. . . . . .

All of which in the end may appear to have everything to do with our story.

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